

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/27689536) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/27689536>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Francis Dolarhyde/Randall Tier , Mason Verger/Original Male Character(s)
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Jack Crawford , Beverly Katz , Randall Tier , Francis Dolarhyde , Donald Sutcliffe , Dr. Frederick Chilton , Freddie Lounds , Abigail Hobbs , Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Crime , Crime Family AU , Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics , Alpha Will Graham , Omega Hannibal Lecter , Will is a crime boss , Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con , Dark Will Graham , Reluctant True Mates , Angst with a Happy Ending , Murder as Courting , Kidnapping , Weddings , Possessive Behavior , Scentmarking
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-11-23 Completed: 2020-12-15 Words: 31,637 Chapters: 4/4

Nothing Gold Can Stay

by [BelladonnaWyck](#), [raiast](#)

Summary

There are a half dozen Families that have run Baltimore for the last several decades, most of which have seen a tentative if not uneasy peace. But when Jack Crawford loses his mate and foul play is suspected, blame is pointed in Will Graham's direction, an Alpha relatively new to the business of running a Family.

With enemies springing up all around him, Will is forced to prove his innocence even as he fights for his life, and a mutually beneficial arrangement is struck with a very unexpected Omega.

Notes

Thanks to our darling Julius for the prompt! We've been excited to share this one for MONTHS!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Jack Crawford cradled the hand of his wife as she finally succumbed to the illness which had gripped her suddenly and without mercy. Her normally deeply bronzed skin had turned pale and grey, her usually bright, cheerful eyes permanently closed as she quietly slipped away.

Hannibal stood to the side of the room, observing as Doctor Sutcliffe began the process of dispassionately detaching her from the myriad of wires that had kept her alive for the last several days. No amount of money or modern medicine in the world had been enough to save her, and it seemed some of those gathered had their own thoughts as to *why*.

“They say poison is a weapon often wielded by women and Omegas.” Frederick Chilton, Hannibal imagined, probably thought himself so very clever with that barb, though Hannibal - as an Omega himself - let it slide off him like nothing. He’d heard far worse from people far more respectable than Chilton.

“I don’t want to hear it right now, Chilton. I’ve just lost my Bella. I want to grieve in peace and bury her.” Jack’s grasp never slackened on Bella’s hand, even as Sutcliffe moved around him to continue packing up so he and Hannibal, as his attending nurse, could leave.

Hannibal could have saved her; he was sure of it. But as an Omega now in America, he had no rights. He was lucky he was allowed to practice medicine at all, even as a nurse. If it weren’t for his sponsor Sutcliffe, he’d never have made it to the states and would never have been able to stay within the field. Though, of course, it’s also precisely because of the odious man that he could not return to his home in Europe, a far more progressive area of the world where he studied to be a doctor, even had his own practice before he’d gotten greedy and wanted to come to America.

“I’ve seen this before, a few years ago when I attended Beau Graham.” Sutcliffe provided unhelpfully, and Hannibal wanted to sneer at the obvious manipulation. Donald hated the Grahams, had held a secret grudge for years, and had gladly relished in Beau Graham’s death. He hadn’t even *tried* to save him.

“Beau died by poison?” Jack had been friends with the Grahams once upon a time, or, at least, they’d been unsteady allies, Hannibal had heard. Several of the family heads had grown up together, attended the same schools, many of them working together to achieve relative peace in Baltimore.

“And we all know the theories surrounding *that* particular *coup d’état*. A silent killer. Who else could we *possibly* know with a penchant to move in shadows and has no care for anyone other than himself?” Chilton snarled sarcastically, spreading his hands open as if to say: *See? There’s your answer.*

“Will didn’t kill his father, Chilton. What reason would he have for that? He didn’t even *want* to lead the family.” Hannibal noted Jack sounded less sure than he had just moments before, a furrow developing between his brow as Bella’s hand finally quietly slipped from his grasp, nearly unnoticed.

“Or so that’s what he told everyone. But I have it on good authority that he offed his dear old daddy when the man wouldn’t let him marry that Tier boy of Francis’. Said it wasn’t natural for two Alphas to mate, which obviously he’s quite right about *that*. To this day, Will and Randall are thick as thieves.”

As was expected of him, Hannibal was silent, but he was curious when logic would finally replace the tension thickening in the room. If Will Graham had wanted his father dead so he could mate Randall Tier, why hadn’t he done so in the nearly five years since Beau’s death? He also recalled, vividly, those final hours as the senior Graham’s life faded from him. He recalled the young Alpha, sitting vigil in the corner of the room, silent and still as a statue, refusing to deal with any family business brought to him as he awaited the inevitability of becoming an orphan. *A leader*. When Hannibal opened that particular door in his memory palace, the bitter scent of distress and sorrow flooded his nose.

It seemed that logic wouldn’t be returning. “You’re right, they are. Everyone knows the Grahams have always been a scheming family of silent, ruthless killers. But I still remember what they did to Hobbs not long after Will took over, had him assassinated, and for what reason? He never explained himself to anyone, never consulted the families before acting. Hobbs’ poor Omega and his daughter were caught in the crossfire, the entire organization dissolved within days after Garret was killed. Will had only been in charge for a few months at that point.”

“Imagine what he could get up to with *years* under his belt now. I’ve never trusted that twitchy little man. A psychopath if ever I’ve met one.” Chilton moved to lean against one of the far walls, seemingly awaiting Jack’s reaction to this new *information*.

The room was silent for several long moments, Jack looking into the face of his wife, features softened and peaceful now that she was no longer fighting whatever illness had torn through her body. Hannibal found himself waiting with bated breath as well, curious how things might progress. What Chilton was suggesting was enough to start an all-out war between the six crime families of Baltimore. It would be devastating, with heavy losses on all sides.

Jack stood, addressed the room, though Chilton was the only person in attendance with any interest in the proceedings. “I’ll kill him for what he’s done to my family, to my sweet Bella. I won’t rest until his entire family is brought to its knees and then put six feet in the ground.”

Will didn’t have time for this. But when Bev called him to the warehouse for a meeting, he knew it was important.

“It’s bad, Will. Price says Jack is mobilizing already, and he has the help of some of the other families.”

“He has Central Baltimore, which means he has *Chilton*. Hardly someone for me to worry about. It’s not anything that’ll keep me up at night, Bev. What’s this really about?”

Beverly Katz was the best right hand he could ever have hoped for. She was sassy and brash and didn’t shy away from giving Will difficult truths like some of his crew often did. She

didn't pull punches, always more than willing to be the one in a crowd of *yes men* to stand up and tell him no or that he was being an idiot. One could argue she was the brains of his entire operation, and she was certainly its heart. She tossed her dark hair over her shoulder now, her gaze pinning him in place.

"You might not think Chilton is a problem, but he stirs shit up, Will. And Jack just lost his mate. He's *dangerous*. Deadly, like a cornered animal. He's got it in his head you had something to do with Bella's death. Chilton has him convinced you poisoned her. He won't rest until you're dead. And that means the city hurts too, not just you or our crew. Everyone loved Bella; the woman literally won a peace prize or some shit."

Will tapped his fingers on the cold steel of the table, eyes drawn to the shadows in the corners of the room. He was always on alert, his hindbrain always running on instinct to protect himself and his people, and it was easy for him to slip into the realm of the paranoid. He forced himself to focus on Beverly in front of him instead, ignoring the potential ambush points his brain unhelpfully supplied to him.

"You don't sound so sure yourself that I didn't do it, Katz. You know I didn't kill her, right? I have no reason to antagonize Jack even from a purely tactical perspective. But also, I *liked* Bella. I respected her." Will had been sad to hear of her passing, though of course that emotion had been short-lived when it had nearly immediately been followed with word of a bounty placed on his head by Jack Crawford.

They'd had an uneasy peace in Baltimore for years, made even more peaceful though no less tenuous after the death of Garret Jacob Hobbs. He knew the families didn't trust him; when they looked at him all they saw was the absence of his father. Still, even after all these years, Will hadn't quite lived up to the expectations laid by Beau Graham. He was certain he never would be able to fill those shoes.

Beverly sighed, her face softening as she stepped closer to Will, placing a hand on his shoulder. "I know, Will. That was never in question. But you know as well as I do that perception matters a Hell of a lot more than *truth*. Especially when it comes to matters of the heart."

"So what are you suggesting we do? Sit around and wait for him to strike? I don't know, Bev. I think playing the stronger hand is important here. I should hit them first. Maybe finally fucking take out Chilton and Freddie, thorns in my side that they are." Will groused, smiling when he heard Bev's huff of laughter.

"Try not to start a war we aren't prepared for and don't really *need* to be in, Graham. I think some good old fashioned conversation might work out in this case, though we should still be cautious. There have been rumblings that Jack has already dispatched men to hunt you down. The entire bounty goes to the first one who can give him proof of death, so watch after yourself and keep somebody with you at all times."

"You gonna look out for me, Katz? Is that it?" Will teased, and smiled even wider when Beverly stuck her tongue out at him.

“Someone needs to, but it won’t be me. Not tonight anyway, I’ve got a hot date.” She winked, slapping her hands together before walking towards the exit.

“Call Tier, Will. Have him come scout for you and stick by your side until you get home. I have some guys posted at your door already, and before you say any fucking thing about it, the only words I best hear come out of your mouth are thank you.” She tossed him a withering look over her shoulder, and he let out an annoyed huff but complied.

“Thank you, Bev.” He parroted, and she smirked and left him behind with a nod of her head.

He was tired, too tired to wait for one of his crew to show up, especially not Randall, when he knew the man was off somewhere with Francis. They thought they were subtle, but Will could see the two of them clear as day. They’d been hooking up for months, but recently Will had noticed a more serious shift in their dynamic, and he was happy for it. They both deserved to be with someone who understood them and this life, someone solid.

He let out a sigh, trying not to get too despondent about his own lack of love life, and stepped out into the chill air of a winter night in Baltimore. The air was crisp and cool, and snow clouds hung low in the sky, interrupting the light of the moon and stars.

Will didn’t have time to enjoy the scenery before there was a *whiz* of sound flying past his ear, and then another and another.

Guns. They were equipped with silencers, so clearly the shooters were assassins sent to take him out. He was honestly surprised Jack would go for such an easy kill, especially if what Beverly had said was true, and he was as emotionally invested in Will’s death as it seemed, but he supposed no one really controlled the kill choices of bounty hunters.

He dived behind one of the barrels lined up alongside the back exit to the warehouse, ducking for cover but not quickly enough. A sharp burst of pain exploded in his right shoulder, enough to steal his breath and rattle his bones. Will clenched his teeth around the pain and pulled his gun from the holster vest he wore at all times beneath his coat.

Will fired two shots and then heard the muffled, heavy sound of a body dropping followed by retreating feet echoing off the walls of the little alley. Before he could check his surroundings he was falling to the ground, black spots dancing in his vision as he nearly passed out from the shock of being shot, sheer willpower alone keeping him awake and alive.

He pulled his gun again when he heard steps approaching, nearly shooting before he saw a vaguely familiar face. The man was covered in blood, his teeth gleaming bone-white in the light of the moon and stained crimson. He looked like some feral, primal beast more than a man, but something about him set Will slightly at ease, though he still kept his gun raised; he knew his aim wavered unsteadily the longer he kept his injured arm raised, could only hope that the hard set of his eyes and flash of his bared fangs was enough to prove that he meant business, wounded or not.

“Mister Graham, may I see your shoulder?”

Will scented the air, which was thick with the stench of blood, and couldn't detect any additional attackers, though the scent of muscadine wine and fall spices floating beneath the harsh strike of copper was both familiar and soothing. He nodded stiffly, shuffling away at the last second as he recalled where he'd seen the man before, his scent bringing forth a memory from his father's deathbed; Sutcliffe and his nurse.

"Aren't you a *nurse*?" Will asked, and he could sense Hannibal's surprise but couldn't quite pin it to something specific.

"Ah, you remember me, I presume. I attended Doctor Sutcliffe when he came to care for your father. Though *care* may be too strong a word."

Will clutched his shoulder, wincing at the blood pouring through the gaps in his fingers. He could feel the bullet still inside the wound, shifting every time he moved his arm. He tried to focus on the other man looming over him, even as he kneeled beside Will and gently tried to move his hand out of the way.

"You were there when he pulled a few slugs from Bev, too. And when he had to stitch up Anthony after nearly getting gutted by some Omega's Alpha."

"Doctor Sutcliffe did good work that night, bringing Mr. Dimmond back from the brink of death. A shame there was no saving the offending Alpha after you got your claws into him." Hannibal's tone was brusque, his movements methodical as he poked at the edges of Will's wound, but Will could tell the Omega was pleased to have been remembered by him so thoroughly.

Will cringed, jerking his shoulder away instinctively and hissing as the movement only sent another nauseating shock of pain into his chest and down his arm. "*Damnit.*"

"You'd find a reduction in pain if only you'd stop flailing the injured limb about and let me see to it," his nurse pointed out tersely. "This is lodged far too deeply. I'll need an instrument to remove it and stitches to close the wound." Hannibal paused, sharp eyes tracking down the length of Will's arm to the cooling pool of blood on the filthy pavement below him. "A transfusion would be advisable."

Will nodded, already well-aware of that as an incessant, hazy darkness started creeping into the edges of his vision. "I have a supply back at the house."

"My car is only around the corner." The Omega didn't even flinch at the idea that Will had a store of his own blood at his house, didn't ask any questions. His time with Sutcliffe had clearly gotten him accustomed to dealing with people in careers like Will's.

Will nodded again, grit his teeth as he bolstered himself for the agony of attempting to hold his own weight on legs shaky as a fawn's, even for the short walk to Hannibal's vehicle. His breath was forced from his lungs, any attempt to swallow down perceived weakness forced out along with it when the Omega braced an arm against his back. Another arm slid beneath his knees, hoisting Will up with seemingly minimal effort.

Will's body tensed harshly, awaiting the sudden and inevitable drop as the Omega realized he'd overextended himself, had been too confident in his own abilities. When he had strode a dozen feet with nary a falter in his strength, Will felt himself relax slowly into the embrace surrounding and stabilizing him. By the time the sound of a car chirping breached Will's foggy mind, the Alpha had made the conscious effort to let go completely, almost welcoming the haze that slid over him. Darkness bubbled up around him like a rising tide, warm and safe and blissfully empty, and Will was happy to have the scent of spiced muscadines and his childhood teasing through the unending black as he let himself go completely.

Awareness seeped into Will's consciousness a breath before pain. He was able to determine that the darkness that was his world was not the same comforting darkness which had enveloped him earlier, but merely the result of his heavy eyes fighting him as he attempted to pull them open. His shoulder was alight with flames that existed only in the sensitive tendrils of his nervous system, zipping into his pecs and down his bicep as the area was jostled with every shallow breath.

The sound of a familiar voice filtered through the cold and harsh reality that started to crumble and crash around him, "I know I couldn't have predicted it, but I also knew the risk was there. I never should have left him alone at a time like this. It was foolish."

The hum and rumble of a more distant, male voice invaded the silence in the absence of Bev's words, and the Omega gave a humorless huff at whatever the response to her self-chastisement had been. "I know him well enough to ignore his orders when I need to. I knew he seemed distracted; I just didn't think -"

"You never do," Will piped up, surprised to find the words rusty and coarse in his dry throat. "You aren't the thinker. That's my job, remember?" He forced his lids to raise, then, comforted immediately by the affectionate smile and mischievous spark that lit the eyes of his best friend. "What sort of world would we live in if *Beverly Katz* had to think through her actions?"

"A boring one, I imagine," Bev agreed, her smile spreading wider as she caught Will's gaze. She reached over to him with her left hand and brushed away the sweaty curls matted to his forehead before petting down his neck with fond reverence. "Hey, killer. Scared me for a minute there."

Will scowled and bristled at the declaration, uncomfortable facing the depth of anxiety-riddled uncertainty flooding Bev's throaty voice. He bared his fangs against the pain that shot through him with the movement. "I'd be a damned poor leader if I let myself go out with a slug to the *shoulder*," he grit out, forcing down the nausea that bubbled up alongside the flare of white-hot pain. "Be real, Bev."

"You lost a considerable amount of blood for a simple *slug to the shoulder*," the other voice in the room sounded, closer this time. With his eyes open and clarity finally breaking through the haze of unconsciousness, Will realized the stilted, rumbling tones belonged to the Omega nurse that had found him shortly after the encounter - or was it during?

The phantom image of crimson-soaked fangs and a bloody chin slid over the view that Will currently had of the prim, stuffy looking Omega before it ultimately rippled and dissipated. Had that been real, or merely a product of Will's pain-laced, blood-deprived mind? One more hallucination to add to his growing collection.

"Far more, in fact, than your personal supply allotted for. It's only too fortunate that you and Miss Katz share the same blood type."

Will glanced down to his arm, finally made aware of the tube taped to the crook of his elbow. He followed the winding plastic, surging red with the blood being passed into his body, to Bev's own forearm, before finally pulling up to her comforting face once more.

Her lips were twisted into an all too familiar smirk, her dark eyes glinting with mirth. "I always wondered why you bothered keeping me around all these years. Now that I know I was just a walking blood bank for you, the illusion of friendship is shattered."

Will gave a huff, a smile twisting his own lips around the grimace that already fit them. "Amazing that one little piece of lead could accomplish what *years* of passive-aggressive snark and thinly veiled skepticism couldn't."

Will's heart twisted in his chest as Bev's expression softened, though her tone when she spoke, was chiding. "I love you, idiot. Be more careful next time."

"Hannibal, unhook her. She's lost too much blood," Will jested, mouth splitting into a grin even around the dull ache of Bev batting at his good arm playfully.

"I must agree," the Omega admitted as he stepped closer; Will's senses were overwhelmed once again with the scent of comfort and home as the nurse began to fuss with the tubing that connected the two of them. "You've given quite enough, Miss Katz. I thank you for your assistance and must now insist that you have a glass of juice, get some rest, and be sure to take some iron and B vitamin supplements over the next several days."

"He's pushy for an Omega," Bev commented to Will dryly.

"*You're* an Omega and pushier than *he* is," Will shot back, to which Bev merely nodded her acquiescence before dipping low to scent him fondly. She murmured a gentle *get well* into his ear and then pulled away, striding from the room as though she hadn't just had an excessive amount of her life force drained from her.

When the makeshift blood transfusion contraption had been disassembled, and a piece of gauze taped to Will's inner arm, Hannibal settled into the chair Bev had vacated, back straight as a rod and one leg folded primly over the other. They regarded each other for a moment before Will remembered himself and blinked, eyes scanning the room briefly.

The makeshift clinic was his own room, which accounted for the familiar, comforting scent of the nest he was tucked into. They were alone, the surprise of which was both shocking and a relief. "You didn't call Sutcliffe."

The Omega before him sat still as a statue, though Will wagered the slight downward tick of his lips and furrowing of his eyebrows was as much of an outward bristling as he would allow in this company. "I'm more than capable of handling such a situation without Donald," Hannibal informed him tersely, eyes sharp and trained balefully upon Will as though daring him to argue the fact. "In fact, you could go so far as to say you were *lucky* it was only I who saw to your care. Doctor Sutcliffe would have ushered an Omega from the operating room *long* before Miss Katz could have informed him the two of you shared a blood type."

Will studied the man sat by his bed, did his best to ignore the heat blazing through him as their gazes met and locked. It was a fire so similar and different to the pain that pulsed beneath the flesh of his shoulder, the hole that was once muscle and nerves and fat and skin now just an empty chasm of pain and carnage. "It seems the stars have aligned in my favor tonight. Lucky that Bev is A Neg, lucky it was you and not Sutcliffe that saw to my care. Lucky that you stumbled upon me at all."

The Omega's ruddy eyes flashed as Will spoke the last, just the hint of Omegan gold, laced with something that looked both like satisfaction and guilt. *Curious*. "Indeed," he agreed after a moment of nearly insufferable silence. And then, the sound of rattling as an all-too-familiar bottle was plucked from Hannibal's pocket and held as evidence between them.

"I found this in your pocket. I'm guessing the receipt I found along with it wasn't a fluke." Hannibal paused, gazing expectantly at Will. When Will refused to add his own input to the Omega's musings, Hannibal continued. "You only purchased this bottle yesterday, Will, and it's nearly half gone. It's no wonder you nearly bled out from a shoulder wound; your blood has been thinned dangerously with the level of aspirin you've consumed in the last day. That's not to speak of the potential damage you're causing your liver -"

The irritated nurse seemed to catch himself just before he slipped into the throes of a self-righteous, condescending rant. He closed his eyes, just for the span of a breath, but Will's own breath was stolen as he *watched* the man shutter away his every emotion. When he opened his amber eyes once more to regard Will, his face was as unmovable and unfeeling as stone. "Would you like to tell me why you've felt the need to ingest so much aspirin in the last twenty-four hours?"

Indignation flooded through him, and Will couldn't stop his eyes from narrowing as he shot back, "Would you like to tell me why you're so desperate to practice medicine without your Alpha present?"

Hannibal's gaze grew colder still, if that were possible, his tone clipped and icy when he replied, "Donald is not my mate, merely my sponsor. In Europe, I was able to practice medicine - *real* medicine - on my own. I'd earned the right to do so with years of study, blood, sweat, and tears. It seems America cares little for my credentials; the closest an Omega can get to an operating room here, apart from being the one on the table, is by acting as an assistant, and even then only if they have an Alpha that is a practicing doctor to vouch for them."

This was a genuine surprise to Will, who was well-acquainted with the opinion at large on Omegas in American society - namely that they were weak, docile things best meant for keeping house and raising pups. It was only their strong genes for breeding that held them in

higher regard than Betas, though at least Betas were able to take a career and travel at their leisure without an Alpha by their side every step of the way.

“You can’t get certified to practice here?” Will shifted carelessly, instinctively attempting to push himself into a higher seated position, and then winced at the pain that wracked through him.

Hannibal’s hands were on him at once, stabilizing his injured arm and urging him to remain lying down with a firm hand on his good shoulder. “Not without applying to a university and starting the process anew. Even if I had the time and funds to do so, Donald would never allow such a thing. As my sponsoring Alpha, he has the final say in such a decision. Now, Miss Katz had informed me you wouldn’t appreciate being drugged and stayed my hand when I attempted to administer painkillers.” Hannibal plucked up a bottle that sat next to the aspirin he’d abandoned on Will’s bedside table. “Now that you are cognizant enough to consent to their ingestion, I really must insist you take them. They will help you rest, something your body desperately needs at the moment.”

Will stared balefully at the pills in the Omega’s outstretched hand. “There’s already been one botched assassination attempt in the last twenty-four hours. You really think the smartest thing for me to do right now is to lay drugged up in bed? I can’t afford to dull my awareness or my response time. I have plans to make.”

When Will made no move to accept the drugs, Hannibal gave a soft huff and pushed them into his hand. “Laying drugged up in bed might be the only thing to save your shoulder from permanent damage at the moment. You need to heal, Will. You need to rest. Take the pills,” he urged softly.

Will felt something tug inside his chest, both soothed and compelled to follow the Omega’s suggestion. He wondered why that was, when Hannibal hadn’t debased himself enough to slip a placative whine into his tone, nor purr for him. He didn’t need to fall back on Omegan manipulation techniques; something about the man simply set Will at ease naturally.

“I won’t leave you, Will,” Hannibal promised. “I’ll keep you safe.”

Will’s gaze pulled from the medication in his palm up to the Omega’s face, surprised to find that, for whatever reason, he believed him. He took the pills and told himself it was to beckon sleep before the shadows already shifting in the corners of the room could become living, creeping things, slipping farther into the sanctuary of the liminal space he and Hannibal shared.

He was asleep again within minutes.

“You can go home now and then, you know. I’m sure Doctor Sutcliffe has been missing his assistant.”

Hannibal had seemed guarded over the last week, but something in his demeanor shifted at the mention of Sutcliffe, his features going shuttered and dark. Will raised an eyebrow and

waited; Hannibal would speak when he was ready. Or he wouldn't. And Will was just fine with either.

"*Doctor Sutcliffe* has relieved me of my position and my home, which was also under his care and control. I have nowhere else to be, dear Will, and I'm happy to aid you."

Will heard what Hannibal *refused* to say. He needed help. He had nowhere to *go*, no home to return to after he'd tended to Will. And it wasn't as though Will was struggling for money, but he *could* always use an extra pair of hands around the house.

"You'll take the guest room." Before Hannibal could interrupt, Will continued. "I won't have anyone working with me without a roof over their head and a safe place to sleep. This is a dangerous business, Hannibal."

It was Hannibal's turn to raise a brow at the declaration, a small twitch twisting his lips from a frown into something not quite a smile, but close. "I'm to be working for you now, is it?"

"*With me*. It's a joint venture in this business, and everyone has equal responsibility and equal risk."

"So you don't have workers, you have co-conspirators?" The quirk of his mouth was *absolutely* a smile now, teasing and full of mirth. Will couldn't help the thought that he was beautiful like that and he wondered from where the notion originated.

Hannibal moved to the kitchen, taking their empty coffee cups and putting them in the dishwasher before he started pulling things down from cabinets and opened the fridge. Will could see just a peek of the contents, and realized he didn't recognize the vast majority of items now inside his own fridge.

"I'm well enough to cook again on my own, Hannibal. Don't feel like you *need* to do that for me."

Hannibal actually laughed at him, covering his mouth with his fingertips as though trying to contain the sound. "Apologies. But I saw the sorry state of your pantry when I first arrived, and I'd be hard pressed to call whatever you were doing before all this *cooking*." He went back to said pantry, pulling out an array of cookery before returning to the fridge and gathering ingredients. Will saw fresh chives and eggs before Hannibal's body blocked his view. "In any case, working in the kitchen happens to be one of the few Omegan stereotypes of which I'm not adverse to indulging in. I find it rather soothing, all said, and quite empowering to create something from nothing."

One of the few stereotypes... Will's Alpha lifted its head at the suggestion of *creation*, and Will was hit with the image of Hannibal covered in sweat and come and then, afterwards, swollen with Will's pups. He shook it off, blinking through the afterimage as it burned behind his eyes and watched Hannibal work.

A small smile crept across his lips as he spread his torso across the island between, folding his good arm beneath him and peering up at the Omega. "What are some other stereotypes you enjoy indulging in, then?"

Hannibal continued stirring milk and salt into an egg mixture. Once he was happy with it he moved it to the side and started working on the chives. "None that pertain to the conversation we should be having," Hannibal replied tersely but his voice was still thick with levity as his knife started breaking down the herbs before him in a series of rapid snicks. His eyes were sharp upon his task, but Will could see the relaxed line of his shoulders, the slight uptick of his own pink lips.

"Sure," Will agreed with a nod. "The matter at hand being, of course, how to royally fuck up Sutcliffe for being such a prick."

Hannibal's eyes darted to Will, sharp with surprise before they softened almost immediately with a warm fondness and dropped back down to the counter before him. "I could neither confirm nor deny whether or not I would condone such a response," Hannibal began, ever one for tact and propriety. "Although the fact remains that he is still my sponsor in this country, and could make a great deal of trouble for me. All things considered, turning me out - while a disproportionate and petulant response to my supposed sins - was one of the kinder punishments Donald might have conferred upon me."

Even given the fact that his features were twisted in a near constant frown, Will felt irritation and anger bubble up within him. He couldn't imagine evicting *any* Omega to the streets of Baltimore with nothing to their name, let alone one as spectacular as *Hannibal*. "And what was your crime?"

"I saved you," Hannibal informed him stoically as he scraped his chopped herbs to the side of his board and pulled forward a bell pepper to give it the same treatment. "Or, rather, I saved you *alone*. It was highly unprofessional, you see. Immoral and unethical, to administer care or medication without an Alpha present."

"But he knows you have the skill, though, and he must have known you had the proper supplies. You have a doctor's bag, it was sitting near my nest when I first woke up. It's how you were able to extract the bullet and stitch me up. Why would you have that if he were so uncertain of your ability?"

Hannibal finished the clean cuts on his red pepper, hesitated when he began reaching for the green, as though unsure whether or not he should continue, and then laid the knife down to the cutting board purposefully before pulling his eyes up to meet Will's.

"He didn't know I had the bag. I procured it illegally. There are...many Omegas in this city who feel they have no one trustworthy to turn to. No one to look out for their best interests. Until now, I have been able to skirt through the shadows and practice in secret as I saw fit. The Omegas that came to me were desperate things, more than willing to pay cash under the table to keep things discreet. And I was more than willing to extend them discounted services, to see they received the care they deserved."

Will stared back at Hannibal, fought the urge to reach out to him. The arm that wasn't supporting his weight was injured, after all, still tied close to his body with a sling to keep his shoulder as immobile as possible. "Well what happened? How'd he find out?"

A small smile tugged at the Omega's lip, shifting from sad to wry in the span of a breath. "You happened, Will. Previously, I wasn't exactly in the habit of camping out at the bedside of my illegal patients."

A surge of guilt flooded Will's gut, made him feel heavy and sick before being burned away by the heat of his annoyance. It wasn't as though it was *his* fault this happened. He never *begged* Hannibal to stay by his bedside.

He couldn't stop the factual and annoyingly accurate voice in his head that reminded him he'd never bid Hannibal to leave it, either.

"You didn't have to do that. I would have been fine. I have plenty of people to help me -"

"I wanted to help you." It was perhaps the first time Will had ever heard the polite, stuffy Omega *interrupt* someone before, and he couldn't help but stare at the man in surprise. His forceful tone was also an odd occurrence.

Hannibal's eyes flashed as he stared him down, molten gold and *sharp*, almost *daring* the Alpha before him to argue the fact, and Will got the sense this was a subject he really shouldn't push any further.

"Okay," he agreed with a nod, attempting nonchalance as he pulled away to stand fully on the other side of the island. It was a submissive and docile gesture, assuring the Omega that he was withdrawing from the potential fight. Odd, how it felt so natural to submit to Hannibal; Will wasn't exactly in the practice of submitting to *anyone*.

The simple gesture must have placated the Omega well enough, for Hannibal merely stared at him a moment longer before nodding and returning his attention to the cutting board, plucking up the green pepper and chef's knife simultaneously. "Do you enjoy cheese in your eggs, Will?"

"What kind of trouble could Sutcliffe make for you?" Will ignored the question in favor of asking his own, one which had been burning the back of his throat ever since Hannibal had mentioned it earlier. When Hannibal merely sent him another sharp glance, Will huffed and rolled his eyes. "I've never sponsored an Omega, Hannibal, I'm not familiar with the laws surrounding such a relationship. Could he have you removed from the country?"

"My quandary is the opposite, actually. Donald refuses to let me return to Europe. Though I entered this country of my own free will it seems that leaving it is not so simple."

"What reason could he possibly have to force you to stay? It's not like you're bonded." Just the thought sent Will's stomach turning, nevermind that it wasn't the case. "Pan's ready," he nodded to the sizzling frying pan on the stovetop next to Hannibal and then, upon seeing that the Omega was still occupied with chopping his vegetables, strolled around the island to toss the package of sausage that had been set out into the crackling pan. It hissed and popped immediately, and Will plucked a wooden spoon from the utensil holder on the counter and started to push at the meat with his good arm.

Hannibal finished with the last of his chopping and then seemed to freeze, body still as a statue with his hands resting on the stainless steel countertop, head bowed. He remained silent for so long Will began to give up hope for any answer at all before he suddenly seemed to reboot and then turned to face him.

“It would seem that’s just the problem. Despite informing Donald of my lack of interest in taking a mate when we first met, he seemed to be under the illusion that he might change my mind on the matter if only he could sweep me away to America. He must have thought I would come around to him once I was in a foreign land; no one else to turn to, no rights to speak of. On paper, Donald must appear somewhat of a catch. Unfortunately for him, all supposed attributes do not extend to the reality of actually *knowing* the Alpha.”

Will’s chest grew tight when Hannibal turned a small smile to him. “Stir.”

Will stared at him dumbly for a solid five seconds before he absorbed the instruction into his brain, and he snapped back to attention at his task. He pushed the meat around hastily, turning over bits gone just a bit too brown in his inattention. “Sorry. Shit. Sorry, I -”

Will choked on whatever mumbled apology was about to fall from his lips when Hannibal stepped closer and placed a reassuring hand to the small of his back confidently. “Just keep stirring,” he murmured, voice low and breath hot against Will’s ear. Will did as he said, incorporating the peppers and onion Hannibal dumped into the pan into the sizzling sausage.

“Shouldn’t we have drained the meat first?” Will asked, even as he followed Hannibal’s instructions.

“Do you have a heart condition, Will?”

He couldn’t help but smirk at the question, posed so dryly by the medical professional beside him. “No.”

“Then a little extra fat won’t harm us,” Hannibal assured him. “When we first met,” Hannibal began, shifting gears in conversation effortlessly even as he continued moving about the kitchen like a dancer. “Donald likely withheld my extrication from America on the feeble hope of successfully wooing me into mating with him. These days, it’s just as likely he’s only doing so to spite me.”

“Are things really that much different in Europe? I didn’t realize we were so terribly conservative here.” Will paused, growing contemplative. “Is there anything I can do?”

Hannibal stiffened, and Will felt a pang of guilt between his ribs. He was being *too much*, like his crew often complained. Sometimes Will’s Alpha was overwhelming even to him, his need to protect those around him, to ensure they had only the best and any threat to their continued happiness was struck down. He sometimes felt more beast than man, and hearing about Hannibal being mistreated was threatening to pull an enraged growl from his throat rubbed raw and tight from the continued suppression of the instinct.

It seemed Hannibal was aware of his predicament, his shoulders relaxing and a small smirk playing on his lips again.

“It’s touching that you’re getting so riled over this but, unfortunately, there aren’t many options. He misled me to get me here and now I have no real alternative course unless I bond with another Alpha, Sutcliffe for some reason decides to revoke his rights, or he dies.”

Will’s eyes flashed, and he couldn’t stop his lips from pulling back to bare his Alphan fangs. He wasn’t sure if it was the idea of *another Alpha* having Hannibal, or the idea of possibly killing this man on his behalf that had him the most agitated. “That could be arranged.”

“A rather tempting offer, though sadly any misfortune to befall Donald would quite likely blow back on myself simply by association.” Hannibal’s reply was both terse and forlorn, as though he’d contemplated just such an endeavor and irritably mourned he’d never realistically be able to bring it to fruition.

His focus returned to preparing their breakfast even as he ushered Will to sit down at the table, bypassing the hightop island stools he had for the shorter ones at the dinner table; easier to navigate and for Will to get out of again even on his own. Will’s heart clenched a little at the thoughtfulness, but he swallowed it all down. It was ridiculous to feel so enamored by an Omega after so little time with them. He had far more important things to consider than courting an uppity creature like Hannibal Lecter.

“You said he misled you. What do you mean by that?” Will knew he was prying, but Hannibal’s scent didn’t change, still that soft reminder of late summer and early fall from his youth. If anything, Hannibal’s scent was slightly sweeter today, probably because he wasn’t stressed over Will’s care as much as he continued to heal.

“I knew him in the early years of my education. Donald is from a well-to-do family and went to boarding school in Paris with me. Years later, he and I went to the same school for pre-med before his family relocated him back to America to finish medical school here.” Hannibal was plating food now with precise movements and far fancier presentation than anything Will would have done on his own.

“When I saw him again it was a year after I’d graduated and had my own practice. He came to me, told me he had a booming business in Baltimore and that he wanted me to join him. The verbal agreement was that I’d spend half a year in America helping him expand his business and then I’d return to Paris, or perhaps even move on to Florence, and continue my practice.” Hannibal sat a plate of beautifully mixed eggs and sausage in front of Will, topped with fresh chives and peppers.

“But that’s not what happened.” Will picked up his fork, letting out an accidental purr of thanks as Hannibal stepped closer, the smell of the eggs hitting him and making his stomach rumble. His cheeks flushed at the behavior, and he tried shaking himself free of his hormones.

“No. I’ve been here for several years now. In Europe, things are far more progressive with Omega rights. We gained equal representation nearly two decades ago along with the right to own businesses and exist without an Alpha. A few years ago, they even passed a law allowing same-dynamic couplings. Donald managed to get me to the one place where he could *keep me*. After such a long friendship, I never suspected he would do such a thing, and

yet,” Hannibal dipped his head as he turned his focus to his own plate, his thought trailing off into the ether between them.

“And yet...” Will echoed softly. He turned contemplative as they ate in relative quiet, his anger bubbling up in his throat at several points as he considered the options. “There may be another way,” he announced to the heavy silence of the room, fork pausing in its efforts to skewer a piece of sausage.

He dragged his eyes from his plate to find Hannibal’s heavy upon him, sharp with interest and still, somehow, soft. Soft with longing, with hope for a solution that he’d yet to find himself.

“Sutcliffe refuses to release you. And his death would only cast suspicion onto you, unless it was *very* publicly someone else. I’m sorry to say I can’t ask any of my crew to take that bullet for a relative stranger. But I *could* sneak you out of the country...” He set his utensils down completely, then, squaring his attention solely to the Omega across from him. “You couldn’t be Hannibal Lecter again if you fled. It would be all too easy for Sutcliffe to track you down, invoke his power as your Alpha, and have you extradited back to America. And then you’d be at his mercy and face Federal charges to boot.”

Hannibal remained silent, watching Will with the wary caution of a mouse sniffing out the cheese on the trap. Will respected him for not immediately voicing his displeasure at this caveat, though he knew it must be destroying the Omega internally to consider giving up his identity and all he worked for in Europe.

“I could get you papers, though - a new identity. Shit, if you give me some time I might even be able to wrangle another medical degree for you. Once that’s done, we just smuggle you onto a boat -”

“The Dragon controls the docks.” It was the first time Hannibal felt the need to interject, and Will had to admit it was an excellent point to make, except for the fact that -

“The Dragon is a personal friend. If I ask him to get you out, he’ll get you out. No questions, no strings.”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed Omegan gold with his intense interest at that particular proclamation; they bore hard into Will, as though daring him to both support and contradict his next point. “As I’ve heard it, the Dragon isn’t in the habit of collecting friends or doling out favors.”

“He’s not,” Will agreed, turning back to his breakfast at long last. It was delicious, and eggs never tasted quite the same once they’d gone cold; it would be a shame to waste them. “As it happens, the Grahams have proven to be an exception to the rule. Don’t worry about the logistics,” he urged the Omega with a soothing and confident purr. “Just tell me you want it done and I’ll pull the trigger.”

He ate his next few bites in silence, with Hannibal’s whiskey-soaked eyes trained heavily upon him. When a full minute had passed and the Omega was still pulling his living statue routine, Will flashed him a carefree grin and gestured to Hannibal’s plate with his own egg-laden fork. “Finish your breakfast.”

It seemed their day wouldn't remain as peaceful as eggs at breakfast, Will's phone ringing shrilly from the couch felt like an omen. By the time he managed to make it to the living room, the ringing had stopped, but it started up again immediately after, and Will's stomach clenched. Bad news, then.

The conversation with Bev was quick but filled Will with dread and rage. He hated rats more than nearly anything, and he hated having to deal with them even more. Hannibal wandered back into the room from the study down the hall just as Will sat his phone back down.

"Hypothetical question for you." Will decided to ask, apropos of nothing. He found himself incredibly curious how the good doctor would handle the situation.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, settling down in the chair across from Will and putting his book down on the side table. "What sort of question?"

"If you ran a *business*, and you heard wind that someone was selling your secrets to the highest bidder as well as compromising your safety and the security of your other employees, what would you do about that person?"

Hannibal stared at Will for several long moments, a smile slowly curling his lips up. "*Hypothetically* speaking, I'd torture him slowly, remove each of his fingers for stealing, carve the name of every person he brought suffering to into his flesh and then slit his throat and watch him bleed out until his miserable life was extinguished."

Will knew his mouth hung open for a second at the raw imagery, shocking when spoken in that affluent, rounded accent. "Well fuck, Hannibal. Whatever happened to *Do No Harm*? Didn't they teach you that in your fancy European school?"

"You'll recall my medical degree isn't valid in America and I no longer legally practice medicine. I believe it only fair that lapse includes my beholdeness to the Hippocratic Oath."

Will was quiet, thoughtful as he sat with that knowledge. "You like to be useful. I know you're uneasy about staying here without reimbursing me in some way. How's about we kill two birds with one bloody stone and call it even stevens, hm?"

Hannibal leaned forward in his seat, his elbows slotting elegantly along his upper thighs. Will's stomach clenched for an altogether *other* reason at the sight of him, but he pushed the need away and focused his attention on the man before him. "I'm sure something can be arranged. Tell me who, what, and when and I will see it done."

Yes, Will thought, he'd underestimated the Omega. He'd assumed him to be like other Omegas, meek and quiet and averse to violence. But he'd seen glimpses behind the facade the doctor wore, and he was glad for his empathy in this moment.

"Come, let me show you."

Chapter 2

Hannibal was slightly out of practice with killing. He'd done it regularly as a student, often picking the rude and discourteous burdens on society and dissecting them as part of his studies. He'd killed the men who'd taken his sister, tortured them, and run them down like the beasts they were.

He found no joy in murder, exactly, it was simple necessity. But as he haunted the alleyway of Will's betrayer, he felt something akin to joy spark in his chest and clog his throat. An unignorable *rightness* about the situation and excitement that he'd please the Alpha through this act of service. It didn't sit well with Hannibal, this feeling of reciprocity or this desire to impress Will Graham. He found himself unable to resist it, left with no course of action but onward.

Edward Jones was as low on the ladder as it was possible to be within the organization, and equally low on the list of respectability. Which meant he would fit perfectly within Hannibal's usual repertoire of killing and eating the rude.

It wasn't unheard of, Omegas resorting to cannibalism. Their distant ancestors had been the true hunters and gatherers of their packs, leaving the Alphas to tend to things at home and keep watch. Hannibal liked to believe he was truly in touch with his Omega, where many people in modern society had started to turn away from such instincts. Omegas were now seen as weak, demure submissives, useful for nothing more than childrearing and tending to the home.

Which, in this case, worked perfectly in Hannibal's favor as it would *never* be suspected an Omega would - or even *could* - kill someone. Hannibal was more than capable, something Mister Jones would soon find out.

It had been easy enough to track him and gather his usual comings and goings. It had only been a few days since Will had proposed this little quid pro quo, and Hannibal must say he was impressed by the Alphas forwardness.

The Beta he'd been waiting for finally turned the corner from the street, looking around before using his key to get inside the building. There were no cameras, Hannibal had checked earlier when he'd stuck putty inside the locking mechanism to ensure he'd be able to open the door even after it closed.

Once Edward had been inside for a few minutes, Hannibal followed, opening the door and removing the putty with gloved fingertips to avoid added suspicion. He wouldn't be able to truly enjoy this kill; it needed to look like a hit, like a business dealing gone wrong. Will had most of the Baltimore Police Department in his pocket, but it meant less scrutiny if it were clearly a hit. Which, Hannibal supposed, it was.

Ultimately, it was a simple matter of looking as small and helpless as possible whilst knocking on the Beta's door to convince him to open it. Once he had, Hannibal removed the gun from his inner pocket, complete with a silencer, and shot the man squarely between the

eyes. He was already dead before he hit the ground, but Hannibal bent low to check for a pulse and, finding none, was down the hall and out of the building in seconds.

Will watched as Hannibal moved around the kitchen like a dancer, gliding from counter to saucepan to refrigerator as though he'd always existed within Will's space. He tried to ignore the clench in his chest when he remembered Hannibal wouldn't be here forever. Will wasn't adept at making friends; he was a leader of people begrudgingly, because his father had left him no other course of action. Because it came surprisingly easy to him even though he didn't want it. But he didn't make *friends*.

Hannibal was his friend. Will could admit that much, though he didn't allow himself to linger overly long on any other thoughts regarding the Omega. Hannibal wasn't his, would never be his, and it was stupid of Will to get comfortable with the man being in his space. Soon enough, he'd be on the first ship out of America Will could find for him, and Will had himself convinced that was *fine*.

"What would you like with dinner tonight, Will?" Hannibal's voice filtered into Will's thoughts and it felt far too natural, Will's Alpha nearly purring with contentment at the proximity of the Omega.

Will realized suddenly that the sweet scent permeating his house and his every waking thought was *Hannibal*, the Omega rich with the scent of an impending Heat. He didn't want to mention it, was sure Hannibal was perfectly aware he was nearing his biannual Heat and didn't need Will awkwardly remarking on it. He put the thought aside as he considered Hannibal's question.

"Whiskey," he grumbled lightly, smiling when Hannibal laughed sharp and bright.

"You know you can't drink on your medications, Will. Though I could, perhaps, allow a small amount of wine with the meal tonight as long as you promise to be a model patient for observation this evening." Hannibal's lips were twisted in a smirk as he leaned over the kitchen island, his scent even stronger this close to Will.

"What are we having?" Will looked at the large pot Hannibal had brought out, and some of the ingredients gathered in front of them. "Are you making jambalaya?"

Hannibal nodded, spreading his hands out as if to show all of the items presented. "I know your family has cajun roots, though you've been in Baltimore for several generations. I thought I'd make a traditional Southern fare tonight to celebrate the success of our partnership."

Partnership. It had been a week since Hannibal had made his first kill on Will's behalf, and he'd killed three others since.

"Cornbread is what my nana always made. And fried okra." Will offered, sliding off his stool and prowling around the island in order to more closely investigate the ingredients.

“Excellent. I think some steamed swiss chard with a balsamic reduction will round out the meal nicely. And I’m making something called *banana pudding*. I found a passable recipe online.” Hannibal gestured vaguely to where his tablet rested on the countertop, and Will eyed the recipe suspiciously. Anything Hannibal Lecter considered *passable* was likely to be considerably fancier than anything Will would ever consider to be banana pudding.

“This is basically banana mousse with handmade wafers, Hannibal. Banana pudding is meant to be comfort food with no nutritional value. I think I might even have Nilla Wafers in the cabinet...” He trailed off as Hannibal observed him with some level of scrutiny, but ultimately the Omega shrugged and locked his tablet screen.

“Perhaps you’ll assist me this evening, then. You can make dessert.”

Hannibal was so careful not to knock into Will when he rounded the island, passing all of the ingredients for the pudding to Will’s side and drifting over to the refrigerator to collect additional items for the rest of the meal.

They worked in a comfortable silence for several minutes, Hannibal moving just as gracefully and effortlessly as ever within the space, dancing around Will as he stumbled around his own kitchen like he’d never seen it before.

He still felt slightly off with his equilibrium, gunshot wounds to one’s shoulder muscles apparently taking far longer to heal than expected. Especially when Will was less than gentle with himself and knew he had been overworking the sore muscles.

“Put that down,” Hannibal’s voice interrupted Will’s pity party, and he traced Hannibal’s gaze to where Will’s hand had just nestled under a five-pound bag of flour, fingertips wrapped around the bottom to lift it.

“I can manage five pounds, Hannibal. It won’t kill me.” He snarked, rolling his eyes and returning to his task. He felt the strain in his shoulder immediately, but tried to keep himself from grimacing, unwilling to give the Omega the satisfaction.

“Hm,” was the only response he got, but when he returned to his little work station, Hannibal reeked of smugness.

“You don’t have to be so pleased by my pain, you sadist,” Will grumbled, mixing in some of the flour into the bowl in front of him. His nana had taught him the trick to help thicken any mixture; from gravy, to pasta sauce, to pudding.

“There is something to be said for the feeling of being *right*,” Hannibal snarked, eyes full of mirth. “Your shoulder will never heal if you don’t let it, Will. That means you must actually follow medical advice and stop overworking yourself. It will be several more weeks of low impact use before you’ll be ready even for *five pounds*. Longer still if you don’t cease with the unnecessary strain.”

Will glared into his pudding, mixing it perhaps a little more aggressively than required. “I’m not accustomed to sitting around on my ass, Hannibal. It doesn’t sit right with me to be sending you out on all these missions when it should be *me* handling my business.”

“I thought it was *our* business? If we are partners and I’m not simply under your employ as you stated before. Which means we should share the burden, something I am currently more than happy to take the brunt of while you *heal*.”

Will didn’t say anything for a long time, Hannibal’s gaze never lifting from his task as he worked on their meal. Something clenched in Will’s chest, and he didn’t want to acknowledge it, but he couldn’t ignore the way it thickened in his throat and brought a flush to his cheeks. He couldn’t believe he hadn’t realized before that Hannibal was *courting him*, however accidentally he may have been doing so or not.

Traditionally Omegan gestures of a courtship such as caretaking, cooking meals, scenting any shared spaces. It was no wonder Will’s house had been full of the Omega’s scent for the last week, his impending Heat and his subconscious scenting of every room in Will’s house clinging to the space in a cloying layer of sweet muscadine wine and cinnamon.

He considered the Omega’s fierce bid for independence, his long-denied yearning to return home, and decided not to mention it. If Hannibal wasn’t aware of his actions, Will didn’t want to pressure him into anything. “You’re right. I’m just grumpy because I hate being cooped up. I haven’t left the house and I’m getting restless.”

“Perhaps we could go for a short walk tomorrow? There’s a park nearby. I could make us a picnic with leftovers from dinner?” Hannibal hummed absently as he stirred the large gumbo pot on the stove, and Will couldn’t help the broad smile he gave to Hannibal’s back, biting back on the urge to quip the words *it’s a date*. The phrase hung heavily between them regardless, Will’s purr at the suggestion soft and pleased.

Will was nervous in a way he hadn’t felt since his father had died, and he’d realized he was suddenly tasked with the care and wellbeing of dozens of people. There was no reason to doubt Hannibal. The Omega had, if nothing else, only proven to Will over the last few weeks just how capable he was. All the same, Will couldn’t shake the anxious buzz that settled just beneath his skin, pushed him to pace restlessly as he awaited the Omega’s return. He felt completely helpless, knowing Hannibal was out there dealing with Will’s business, putting himself in harm’s way. Ironic, considering the whole thing had been Will’s idea in the first place.

Dread twisted sickly in his stomach when his buzzing phone displayed Hannibal’s number; the two of them weren’t exactly in the habit of chatting on the phone, especially on the job.

“Hannibal.”

“Will. It’s finished.”

Will couldn’t deny the sense of relief that flooded him upon hearing the Omega’s smoky voice, even as he caught the breathless tone and his anxiety spiked. “Good. Could have just told me that at home.”

“There was...a complication. I’m going to be a bit later than anticipated.”

Will's blood ran cold at the declaration, his Alpha perking to attention and starting to prowl in the cage of his chest. "Tell me."

"Mister Richmond had company. Two others. I was able to dispatch them, but one managed to catch me with his knife in the process. Just a little."

Rage flooded through him, hot and corrosive like acid. That someone would *dare* harm Hannibal, that Will couldn't even be afforded the opportunity to make them *pay* for it with his own hands. "How does someone get *a little stabbed*, Hannibal?" Will snarled and then, angry at himself for allowing his rage to be misplaced upon Hannibal, hoisted up the nearest object to him - a vase on the mantle of the fireplace - and hurled it across the room. The resulting storm of shattered glass soothed him slightly, and the blazing pain that shot through his shoulder as he tore open his stitches only served as another distraction to the unbearable need to *destroy*.

"That quite sounded as though you ripped your stitches. *Again*." Hannibal's voice was almost *droll*, though heavily annoyed if not entirely unsurprised. It wasn't the first time since they'd met that Will had ripped his stitches, the infernal things only remaining in his flesh because he couldn't simply let it *heal* without damaging it further at least once every few days.

"Just. Come home." Will commanded through clenched teeth, dropping the phone to the chair next to him as he ended the call, not entirely confident that it wouldn't otherwise be the next thing pitched across the room.

"Did your new enforcer finally run into some trouble?"

Will stiffened, hackles immediately raised at the deep, familiar voice that sounded behind him. He turned to the open doorway, slowly, so as to not betray his immense concern, and raised a single, unimpressed eyebrow. "Jack."

His eyes roamed over the figure before him, the bulky frame of him blocking the only exit, cold rage set on his face.

"I was wondering what it would take," the Alpha continued, "I've had to throw quite a bit at him."

"Yes, you've certainly kept him busy. No cause for concern though, he's on his way back as we speak. Seems you're down three more, now. I wonder what kind of impact this high turnover rate is having on morale over on your side of the city."

"My people know who to blame." A low growl rumbled from Jack as he shifted his weight, eyes flicking over Will and his surroundings.

Getting ready to attack. Will flexed his arm, rolling his shoulder as subtly as possible, attempting to assess the damage he'd just done. He grit his teeth against the searing pain that burned through his wound. *Not* an ideal time to have just torn his stitches.

Will gave his head a sharp jerk in lieu of shrugging. "*You're* the one that sent them after me."

"*You killed my mate!*" Jack snarled, his fist swinging out to pound against the doorframe that surrounded him.

Will stared at the Alpha, cold rage burning through him even as his stomach gave a sick twist at the accusation. "I didn't," he denied coldly, refusing to remove his gaze even as Jack's eyes flashed red with his ire.

Jack was on him immediately, knocking into his bad shoulder and elbowing him *hard* in the ribs, enough to force the wind from his lungs and to bring an instant ache to his chest and side. He was certain Jack had cracked some of his ribs. Great. Another thing to rely on Hannibal for.

Will attacked back, though he tried to stamp down on his anger and focus on his empathy. He threw several punches, not putting his full weight or power behind them, and tried to crowd Jack against the wall, slowly corralling him back towards the door so he could slam it in his face.

He may have understood the reasoning better now for why Jack has suddenly gone rogue in their decades-long peace, but his ribs smarted, and his shoulder throbbed, forcing enough adrenaline through him that his Alpha couldn't go completely pliant or kind.

"Why won't you fight me!" Jack snarled, landing another blow to Will's ribs that had him hunching over in pain.

Will didn't respond, just cast his gaze to Jack with a mixture of sympathy and frustration. He wouldn't let Jack kill him, but he felt incapable of truly fighting back now that he understood. Will had adored Bella, everyone who ever met her did, and he would have killed anyone who'd harmed her, no questions asked.

So, of course, her husband, her mate and Alpha was beside himself with impotent rage at the fact that there was no *true* villain here, no physical representation that he could fight or kill. Someone had convinced him Will was that scapegoat and Will found himself curious *who*.

"Jack, I respected Bella. I would never have harmed her." Will wheezed, a sharp pain in his lungs and fresh blood trickling from his shoulder, and several new scrapes.

Jack paused, for only a moment, his nostrils flaring wildly as he took in Will's lack of aggression, his calming stance. Will could see the rage shift to something slightly more muted, more logical, as the other Alpha assessed the situation.

"I don't believe you, Will. We all know you had Hobbs and his entire family killed so you could take their territory. Who's to say you aren't trying the same with me?"

Will knew his gaze had probably gone sad and a little guarded at the mention of the Hobbs family, but he also knew he needed to explain things to Jack; it might be the only way to heal this ridiculous feud.

"Jack, I had Hobbs killed because he was a monster. He was brutalizing his wife and girls that looked like his daughter. She presented Omega earlier than usual and was on the cusp of

her first Heat. He'd threatened to *mate her*, Jack. I had it on good intel and after investigating it for myself I had him taken out." Will paused, both to collect himself and to let Jack take in the new information.

"But the carnage at the house—"

"It was too late by the time I arrived. He'd already killed his wife and one of the girls he'd been holding hostage. His daughter was the only one who survived."

Jack seemed unsure, and the new detail seemed to sway him back to anger for a moment. "Abigail Hobbs is dead."

"Long live Abigail Hobbs, then, because she's *not*. I got her out, helped her get a new identity. She's in school in Canada. Psychology major, if you can believe it."

"Prove it." Jack's jaw was set in a hard, clenched line, and Will knew he wouldn't be able to convince the Alpha without proof.

"I'm just going to get my phone, Jack. Don't freak." Will moved to retrieve his phone, stepping back toward the chair he'd abandoned it on slowly, gaze locked on the Alpha before him, his hands spread wide innocently. Jack's eyes honed in on every minor movement, gaze sharp, and body tensed, even as Will could see he was turning over this new information internally.

He dialed the number by memory, putting the phone on speaker.

It went immediately to voicemail.

Jack looked from the phone to Will and back again, an expectant glimmer in his gaze. "Well?"

"Her phone is never off. Something feels wrong about this..." Will was troubled, the girl never turned her phone off. She always had it on her because she knew Will worried. They didn't talk much, just once every few months or so, but something felt *off* about the situation.

"If I get you your proof will you drop this feud, Jack? Neither of us needs or wants the losses it'll mean if we continue on the warpath. You deserve the chance to mourn in peace."

Jack seemed surprised by the sincerity, his shoulders slumping a little as the anger left him. "Get me the proof and we'll have a bigger issue to worry about."

Will nodded his agreement. "Whoever set me up. Some sort of coward, sharpening their blade for me on the whetstone of your grief. I have an idea or two who might fit the bill, but I know just who I can go to for more clarity. Verger's got eyes and ears all over this city. If anyone can help, it's him."

Jack's mouth twisted into a scowl Will was well-acquainted with, though it wasn't directed at him, and for a moment all felt as though nothing had shifted between the two of them.

"Mason Verger is as unlikely as ever to get involved in the squabbling of the Families right

now. The only business he's concerned with at the moment is his new mate and their upcoming nuptials."

Will leaned back against the mantle of the fireplace, conceding the chance of appearing weak to stop himself from collapsing entirely. His whole torso *ached*, and his shoulder, split open once again, was sending tendrils of fire down his arm. "I happen to have an invite. My father racked up more than one favor with Molson before they passed, and Mason and I have fallen into the paths our old men have tread like footsteps in the snow. He won't begrudge me a little shop talk on his big day."

Jack considered this for a moment and nodded and then, as though a switch had been flipped inside him that allowed poisoned thoughts to flood his mind once more, he stiffened, pinned Will with an Alpha-red glare and snarled, "If I find out you're having me on to buy time, to find someone else to foist your crime onto -"

"Jack, if you can show me indisputable evidence that I'm the one to blame for Bella, I'll hand myself over for your righteous retribution without a fight."

The bulky Alpha stomped off without another word, and Will allowed his weight to slump just a little bit heavier against the fireplace, gritting his teeth against the wave of dizziness that momentarily fuzzed his vision as his body sang out its agony. His shoulder itched where blood from his torn stitches was already beginning to dry, and he sighed as he realized Hannibal would want the area freshly washed before he'd stitch it up. *Again*.

He took three sharp breaths, ignoring the deep throbbing the action incited in his ribcage, and steeled himself against further discomfort as he stumbled away from the wall and shuffled to the bathroom. Might as well get the shower finished before his Omega got home, or he'd spend the rest of the night being babied by the insufferable nurse.

Hannibal knew his hubris would come back to haunt him one day, he just hadn't expected it to be in the form of a stab wound to his abdomen.

Thankfully he'd been quick on his feet and the Alpha and two Betas he'd taken down in the process had been caught unawares by the unassuming Omega assassin, so it was only a flesh wound with more blood than actual damage.

He'd tried to explain this to Will over the phone to much growling and the sounds of things shattering on the other end of the line. To *more* ripped stitches.

By the time he made it back to the house it was in disarray and the surly Alpha had decided a shower was an appropriate course of action.

A grunt of surprise sounded from the bathroom and Hannibal peeked around the open door, steam swirling in muggy whirls through the air. "You really must stop trying to kill yourself, Will." Hannibal knew Will was rolling his eyes even though the Alpha's back was turned to him, his form hunched over in pain.

Hannibal stepped forward, unable to stop himself as he noticed Will's ribs were clearly bruised if the deep red marks littering his flesh were any indication. Possibly even fractured. It seemed Will had been just as busy as Hannibal since their brief phone call.

"Yes, well, I can't just stay in bed all the goddamn time or wait on you to help me get dressed or have you out nearly getting killed for me. I have things to do, Hannibal. A business to run." Will's words were forced through gritted teeth, his pain evident in the tightness of his shoulders and the stiffness of his spine as he finally managed to right himself, his towel slipping down his shoulders to show boxers sat crookedly on his slender hips.

"*Business*," Hannibal was not a man to snort, but it was a near thing. Will was the Alpha leader of a criminal organization. Hannibal would hardly consider that *business*. What he'd done for the Alpha earlier that night, or on several nights before it, hadn't been just business. Now that Will was turned more towards him, Hannibal could follow the path of bruises spanning his ribs and abdomen, blood seeping from his - indeed - ripped stitches.

"Keep your opinions to yourself." Will growled, stumbling again but catching himself on the corner of the sink. "I'll ask for them if I want to hear about how to nearly get oneself stabbed to death." Will was concerned, that much was evident in his tone and his overbearing behavior. He also clearly wasn't someone who dealt well with such concern, and it made Hannibal wonder exactly why Will was so worried for him.

"It's nearly midnight. I'd hoped to debrief you on my activities tonight and then see us both settled into bed for the evening. You *need* to rest whether you want to or not if you plan to continue running your *business* for the long term. What happened?"

Will flashed his teeth at that, knuckles gone bone-white on the edge of the sink while he pushed his full weight into it, barely managing to stay steady on his feet. Hannibal wondered how long he'd been pushing himself tonight while Hannibal had been gone, wondered how much longer he'd continue to push before he finally realized he wasn't impervious to the laws of men and nature.

"Jack stopped by for a little *chat*." Will's eyes flashed dangerously, and Hannibal didn't try to rile him further just yet. "He thinks I killed Bella. And now Abi is missing, and you nearly *died*."

Hannibal wasn't sure who the *Abi* he mentioned was, but Will was working himself up, and Hannibal felt something like regret clawing at him, mixed with a little of his own concern for the Alpha. "It was hardly as bad as all that, Will."

Before Will could snarl out a reply he nearly crumpled in on himself as he shuffled away from the sink, and Hannibal shouldered his way into the bathroom to grab him around the middle, barely managing to keep him from falling to the floor.

The jolt was immediate through their damp flesh, like electricity arcing between them. It was far less muted than it had been the night he'd saved Will, unignorable as their skin brushed together without any barriers to separate them. Hannibal could feel the tremble in Will's muscles from this close and couldn't imagine how the man managed to make it this far into his nightly routine before collapsing.

Stubborn thing, he refused to admit defeat and would rather suffer than ever ask for help. Hannibal was forced to tighten his grip around Will's waist as the Alpha tried to shake him off and step forward. Will gave pause at the shock of sensations passing between them, but then he growled, low and warning, and Hannibal was suddenly backed up against the slick, tiled wall of the bathroom, the condensation from Will's shower seeping into his clothes. The Alpha might be injured, but he still carried the strength and muscle of his gender, especially when coupled with the adrenaline still flooding his system.

"What the *fuck*, Hannibal." The words were muffled, pushed through teeth clenched too tightly as Will flashed his fangs at Hannibal. "How long have you known?"

There was a deep, Alphan red flooding his irises, and Hannibal only hesitated for a moment before deciding to tell the truth. Something in his chest *ached* at the sound of betrayed hurt layering thickly in Will's voice. "I suspected since that first night. I was distracted trying to get us both to safety so I wrote off the first incident. But later that night, once you'd fallen asleep and I checked your pulse, I felt *something*. I told myself it was only static and put the idea away to better focus on your recovery."

"Why wouldn't you tell me? You knew. When I told you I'd get you out of the country. You knew. All the dinners. The *picnic*. You knew all along." Will looked a little lost, more than a little angry, and Hannibal felt something swell, tight and painful, in his chest.

"I'm not of the mind such a connection means anything more than superior biological compatibility. The term *True Mates* was coined, once upon a time, and then the notion became overly romanticized." When Will only continued staring daggers in lieu of a response to Hannibal's explanation, he continued, "There's no rule stating we have to be together, Will. We still have the freedom to choose our own futures."

Will released him then, stepping back to insert distance between them, leaving Hannibal bereft in the absence of his heat, his scent, even if it was currently bitter with anger. "*You* have the freedom to choose," Will corrected, coldness seeping into his tone, frosting over the bruise on his wounded ego. "It's hardly a choice for me when I don't know all my options."

The Alpha turned on his heel, set to stalk broodily from the room as Hannibal had already witnessed of him several times in his short stay. "Would it have been an option you'd consider, then?" Hannibal called out, and Will froze in the doorway, back rigid and fists clenched. "If I'd told you the truth from the beginning, if we'd confirmed it sooner. Is that what you would have wanted? An unknown, middle-aged Omega to keep as your own? Would you have expected to claim me? Step into the role of another jailor with another gilded cage for me simply because our bodies tell us we're a good match?"

Will didn't turn back to him, and Hannibal had a decent guess as to why when a hollow, profound sadness rang through his parting words, "Obvious enough it's only what *you* want that matters, Hannibal. Frankly, I'm surprised you even thought to ask."

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After having felt once the incomparably sharp sense of *belonging* when he and Hannibal had touched - after learning the truth about them - Will felt the Omega's absence like an ache throughout his entire body, rivalling even the physical pain that still pulsed dully in his shoulder and ribcage.

Hannibal had gone after him - of *course* he had; the sense of duty he felt to his obligation in the medical field refused to allow a patient in need to walk away untreated. Will allowed him to stitch up his shoulder once more, conceding to the wrapping of his battered torso, all the while sitting in brooding silence, refusing to meet the Omega's gaze.

Hannibal wore medical gloves, so that electric shock of *rightness* wasn't felt again, though now he knew it was there Will imagined he could still feel a faint buzz against his skin through the latex covering Hannibal's hands. He was wise enough not to attempt conversation, though Will could tell he sorely wished to.

Afterward, they each retired to their respective rooms, and Will laid in his nest wide awake, aching for something he hadn't even really realized he'd wanted until an hour previous.

Will huffed out a sigh and shifted restlessly, gritting his teeth against the stinging pain that swept through him at the careless action. Despite his simmering resentment, the desire to go to the Omega and make amends was almost overwhelming as it bubbled up within him. Despite everything, Will knew Hannibal wouldn't turn him away. He could crawl into the Omega's nest and take comfort in being surrounded by his spicy sweet scent, could reach out and quell the ache that hollowed out his being with just a touch of skin.

He wouldn't be able to pin and mount the Omega as he suddenly longed to, body bruised and beaten as it was, but he had no doubt Hannibal would take charge and care for Will in that way as well. He would straddle Will's hips with a brazen confidence, seek his own pleasure unabashedly as he rode Will's cock, all the while ever so careful not to do any further damage to the broken Alpha beneath him. Perhaps he wouldn't even allow Will to knot him, simply rock his hips until his own need had been fulfilled and then deny Will his. Will wouldn't mind though; not if it meant he got to feel what it would be like to be buried in the slick, inviting heat of his Omega, just once.

Just once.

Once would be enough. Enough to scratch the itch burning through Will at the thought, enough to sate his craving for the touch of a creature that biology dictated as a superior match. They could go back to the easy peace they'd found before, after. Will wasn't a greedy man, wouldn't try to take more than what was given to him. He wouldn't deny Hannibal his chance to return home just because they'd fucked one time.

Home.

It was that branch of thought that stilled the hand that had crept down to his aching cock, wiped all fanciful notions of slipping into the Omega's nest in the still of the night from his mind. Hannibal wanted to go home, and Will had promised him he could. What right did he have, to barge in on the man, to heap his own desires onto him under the presumptuous expectation that Hannibal shared them? What right did he have to further entangle an Omega that had been tricked and trapped for years in a foreign, hostile land?

None.

The sound of his door opening was whisper-soft in the deep darkness of the night, and Will kept his eyes closed as he listened to Hannibal close it quietly and walk across the floor on nearly silent feet. He slid beneath Will's sheets and Will could feel his bare skin in several places against his own, the Omega only in a pair of boxers for the night.

They laid in silence for so long Will would have thought Hannibal had fallen asleep if not for the tension he could feel in the body beside his own. The thrum of Hannibal's pulse where his heart pulsed an erratic beat against his chest vibrated through Will's back and clogged up his throat with emotion, the electric spark back in full force in all of the points their bodies touched.

"We can talk in the morning, Will. Get some rest. I'm not leaving." Hannibal curled protectively close, careful to avoid all of Will's injuries so as not to hurt him, and started up a nearly silent rumbling purr deep in his throat.

Will let out a breath he hadn't been aware he'd been holding, his entire body still tight with tension but somehow more lax than he'd been all night as he settled into the sheets and into the warmth tucked so close behind him and, miraculously, he slept.

Donald fidgeted agitatedly, tapping his fingers against the glass top of the table in front of him, careful to avoid the remnants of white powder left smeared across its surface. Chilton had a notorious coke habit, something Donald himself only occasionally partook in. He'd do whatever it took to get Chilton fully on his side today, refused to see *his* Omega drift away from him. He'd put entirely too much work in befriending the doctor and convincing him to come to America with him just to give it all up now.

"Donald, thanks for waiting. Sorry to keep you, I was finishing up with another meeting."

"He means me." A woman with hair the color of a sunset bleeding out across the sky walked into the room seconds after Chilton, a calculating look in her eyes and a cruel smirk upturning her lips. Sutcliffe immediately distrusted her, but he would accept her presence if it was what Chilton wanted. He'd already tried other avenues, had even approached Mason Verger himself to ask for help taking Will Graham out, hoping the man's well-documented greed would make him intrigued at such a notion.

He'd been turned away with a laugh in his face and quite a discourteous shove out of the door from Mason's security staff. He frowned at the memory, remembering his manners when Chilton cleared his throat.

"Yes, of course. It's no trouble." He assured, standing to shake Chilton's hand and then the woman's.

"This is Freddie Lounds. She's a journalist and a close friend who has been done wrong by the Grahams in the past, and she's sympathetic to your cause."

"*Our cause*," Donald started, smiling serenely. "Is mutually beneficial to everyone in Baltimore. Will Graham has been in charge for long enough; I believe it's time the city saw some new leadership."

Freddie tilted her head like a curious bird, taking in Donald like she was sizing him up. He took a discreet sniff and could smell nothing but the void of scent left by a Beta and internally sneered; how uncouth of Chilton to align himself with such trash. Miss Lounds' reputation certainly preceded her. Sutcliffe had heard plenty about her immoral and tactless reporting. Tasteless.

"However true that might be, Will Graham won't be easy to squash. His family helped stabilize Baltimore decades ago when things were far worse, violence and bloodshed rampant. The citizens idolize him; the families respect him. We'll need a trump card." Chilton turned his gaze to Freddie at this, a small smile quirking his lips up. It wasn't a pleasant sort of gesture.

"That's where I come in. I know a secret that Will would rather remain hidden." Freddie practically preened, and Donald swallowed thickly through his dislike.

"How did you obtain such a *secret*?" Donald questioned, skeptical.

"I have my ways." Her coy smirk only confirmed what Donald had suspected already. She'd slept her way into the information, warming the bed of one of Will's most trusted. He wondered who it was.

Donald *hummed* in response, waiting for her to continue.

"Abigail Hobbs is alive. Will has her hidden away in a safe house in Canada, where she's been attending school for the last several years. Nearing her final year, I believe."

Now *that* was surprising news. Donald knew that name, even without a firm connection to any of the families of Baltimore. The Hobbs murders had been massive news, Garrett Jacob Hobbs killing his wife and child before taking his own life. *Allegedly*. The far more believable tale that churned through the social network was that Will Graham slaughtered the Hobbs' in cold blood in order to acquire their territory. But if Abigail was alive...

"What do you propose we do about that, hm? I'm sure she's protected better than a national treasure."

“Getting to her won’t be the problem. I’ve... *befriended her*.”

“Will made the mistake of wanting to keep Abigail separate from the criminal life back in Baltimore, sending her to Canada and cutting all her ties here. She has no idea who Freddie is and trusts her completely. What comes next is up to us. We’ll need some - ah - *persuasion* to make her useful to our needs. She’s an Omega, so she’ll be more open to influence from an Alpha using Alpha Voice.”

Donald turned the idea over in his head for a few seconds, considering. It would take time, perhaps longer than he would prefer, but Hannibal was a petty, stubborn thing. He didn’t imagine this Will Graham would have any easier a time compelling the Omega into his bed, and certainly wouldn’t have the opportunity to bond with him, not if he kept to routine and checked himself into the clinic for his upcoming Heat. He’d caught a whiff of Hannibal the last time he’d seen his nurse, turning him out coldly with the, admittedly *careless*, expectation that the willful Omega would come crawling back to beg him for forgiveness within a day’s time.

“This is not as simple an undertaking as Frederick might have led you to believe,” Donald pointed out, gaze focused on the redhead lounging sideways in a plush, navy armchair. “Even so, Graham will not cease his own movements while we play the long game.”

“Yes,” Chilton admitted bitterly, “There is a matter of keeping him occupied until the final domino has been placed. And with this new *assassin* of his -”

Freddie’s sharp trill of laughter cut through whatever the end of Chilton’s sentence was meant to be, her lips pulled into a wide and wicked smile. “*Assassin*,” she repeated with a snort. “I’d hardly call him *that*. *He’s an Omega*. One skilled in death and lucky as hell, granted, but an Omega all the same. And from what I hear, Graham has grown quite close to him over the last few weeks.”

Donald blinked at that information, his stomach churning bile at the thought. Hannibal taking residence with Graham just as this mysterious Omega killer cropped up out of the blue was likely far from coincidental. “He’s courting him?”

Freddie gave a shrug, as though this topic wasn’t the most important information that had spilled off of her silver tongue yet. “Haven’t heard about anything official, but I hear they’re together near constantly, with the exception of the little *errands* dear Will has been sending his hitman out on.”

“And if we remove this new player?” Chilton piped in, interest piqued once more.

“We leave Graham more open to attack and, potentially, heartbroken and distracted,” Freddie purred. “There only remains the not-so-simple matter as to *how* we do so.”

“For that,” Donald cut in with a near purr of his own, plans unfolding in his mind almost faster than he can keep up with, “I *do* have a suggestion.”

“Then it sounds like we have a plan, gentlemen,” Freddie announced, her smile growing broad. This time, Donald could feel his own lips curl in response.

Will wasn't surprised in the least to find himself waking alone in his nest, though he did lament it briefly. In Hannibal's time at Will's house, he had yet to awaken earlier than the Omega, the other always compelled to the kitchen in the early morning hours to prepare a spread for all those on the premises.

He twisted into the empty space beside him, seeking any lingering warmth and scent while stubbornly ignoring the throbbing ache that pulsed through his torso at the movement. The sheets were long cold, but the Omega's spiced-wine scent remained, and Will buried his face there and sucked it in greedily, spending several long minutes doing so before relenting to the inevitable need to relieve his bladder.

He tried not to think about the compulsion that urged him back into bed, moving instead in favor of seeking out the source of the soothing scent, dressing hastily and sloppily with only one good arm before slipping from his bedroom and heading toward the kitchen.

Now that he was certain he and Hannibal were True Mates, Will found it all the more difficult to deny his attraction to the Omega. He pushed it down all the same, telling himself that relenting to the primal, physical urges of scenting and proximity was enough to soothe the Alpha prowling within him without overstepping his bounds. Tried to assure himself that it would be enough. That in time he would forget the urges altogether, when the source of them had long since departed.

The overwhelming sense of gratitude and approval that filled Will every time he entered the kitchen to find his Omega there flooded him, as usual. However, the presence of another Alpha already present was enough to raise his hackles, spur him closer to Hannibal than his usual seat at the breakfast bar on the other side of the island.

Sal was mated, Will knew, happily and with no intention of entertaining a side piece, but the sight of *his* Omega feeding another Alpha - even one of his security detail, whom he knew to having just been relieved from his night post - was enough to shake something loose from the reserves of Will's control. He stalked around the island, ignoring the greeting from both occupants of the room, and didn't still until he was pressed to Hannibal's back, head dipping forward instinctually to nuzzle against his cheek and scent him.

"Good morning," he purred finally, though his stomach twisted sickly when the Omega stiffened beneath his advances. And then he relaxed, a low purr rumbling from deep within his chest, and whatever hesitance that had seized Will's stomach unspooled with relief.

"Good morning," Hannibal offered again, a small smile on his lips as he twisted his head to butt affectionately against Will's cheek, his tongue darting out to lick a quick stripe over the line of his jaw. "How are you feeling?"

"Just fine," Will murmured, even as the breath required to voice the lie made his ribs ache persistently. "Smells delicious."

"I thought a protein scramble might suit - you *do* usually enjoy it. Bev has already come and gone, and Sal was more than happy to relieve me of the last of the first batch. I've just

finished this one up, if you'd like to take a seat, and then I'll check your -"

Will nudged his cheek against Hannibal's once more, stopping the Omega's words in his tracks. "I have a job for you," he announced, eyes slipping across the island to the Alpha finishing up the last bite on his plate. Sal caught Will's gaze and hastened his chewing, pushing away from the island and excusing himself with a murmured *thanks* in Hannibal's direction. Will *did* so love when his partners were able to take a hint.

Hannibal, on the other hand, merely awaited Will's next words, shaking the pan in his grasp one more time before he moved to plate a fresh serving for Will, appearing wholly uninterested by the unspoken assignment.

"I have to go somewhere tomorrow night. Want you to come with."

He could feel Hannibal's head tilt to the side in consideration, pressed against him as he was, even if Will's eyes lingered on the flecks of pepper that brightened the yellow mixture upon the plate. "You suspect you'll be in danger?"

"No," Will denied, an amused huff expelled from his mouth with the word. "No, it's, uh. It's a wedding. I have business with the Alpha but I...don't want to go alone."

"But you don't fear for your safety," Hannibal reiterated, and Will couldn't help but scowl, already sensing the conclusion the Omega was drawing.

"No," he grit out.

"So you are seeking my company as a companion? A date?"

"I hardly think you need to put it that way," Will snapped, forcing himself to exert some distance between them. Hannibal smelled way too fucking good, right at the pinnacle of being close to the edge of Heat without having yet tipped into the hazy edges of losing himself to his need. It was all Will could do to stop the Alpha within from sticking close to the Omega on principle, ready to defend or service him as needed.

"I'm curious; how do *you* think it should be put, Will?" Hannibal asked, voice silken with a pleased purr as Will grabbed the plate set out for him before stalking away.

Will fell heavily onto a stool on the other edge of the island, clenching his jaw against the sharp ache that jolted through him and snatching up the fork at his place setting. "Do you want to come or not?"

Hannibal tilted his head in thought, hands blindly but confidently beginning the tidying of his workspace. "These are troublesome times for so many of us. It might be nice to step away, to surround ourselves with the joy of love and new beginnings."

Will gave a sharp nod, taking that statement as an acceptance to his invitation, and stabbed at the fluffy scramble on his plate, stubbornly ignoring the buzzing flutter that had so suddenly erupted in his belly.

For every discourtesy and attempted manipulation enacted by Donald Sutcliffe, Hannibal *was* at least grateful he had been allowed to retrieve his personal belongings when the sullen Alpha had turned him out. He'd rescued several of his more favored suits in the process and was glad for it when the unexpected invitation to a *wedding* was dropped into his lap.

A wedding with Will.

Despite having full confidence that he could overcome any biological imperative that being near his True Mate instilled in him, despite his faith in logic and reason over emotion and instinct, Hannibal was surprised to find the idea of such an evening releasing a warm and pleasant fluttering deep in his belly. He was never one to get overly sentimental at weddings he'd attended in the past, and didn't expect to become so at this one, especially given that he had no relationship with either of the intended. But something about the thought of having Will at his side during such an event was... *pleasing* to him.

He reasoned that this was only because he'd yet to see Will in any state of formal dress, the man's attire and personal grooming in a perpetual state of chaotic indifference, and his admiration for aesthetics would certainly extend to the Alpha - beautiful in his own right - groomed and tailored for a formal occasion.

He wasn't far off.

The sight of Will in a suit - tailored, albeit simple - with clean lines and a dark, slim form made his mouth go dry, his skin buzzing as the Alpha sauntered into his room, glancing over Hannibal with a critical and appreciative gaze. "You clean up nice," he murmured, though it was hardly the first time Will had seen him dressed just so.

"And you," Hannibal replied, clearing his throat softly when his words fumbled off his tongue thick and heavy. "I must say I'm pleasantly surprised; I'd resigned myself to your version of formalwear as a black button down and jeans without holes."

Will smirked as he prowled ever closer, "I'm still capable of a surprise or two." He stopped before Hannibal and reached out, tugging at his tie to straighten it - quite unnecessarily, given Hannibal had secured it perfectly only minutes ago when he'd donned it - opening his mouth for some other smart comment to slip out before he paused, his brows creasing and a frown ghosting over his lips. "What is that?" He leaned closer, nostrils flaring as he breathed in before recoiling back almost comically, a sneer on his face. "Are you wearing a *scent blocker*?"

Hannibal straightened his spine and squared his shoulders; his hand itched to reach up to his neck, to assure that his tie was in the correct position, but he didn't want to risk what little scent of Will's touch might linger upon it. "My Heat is drawing quite near. To go out in public without blockers -"

"I'll protect you," Will assured him solemnly.

Hannibal's chest warmed at the earnest frown on the Alpha's face, his gut twisting at the flash of red that streaked through cerulean eyes at even the *thought* of someone being so bold

as to assert themselves into Hannibal's space. He couldn't stop the small smile that twisted his own lips - found very much that he had no desire to.

"To go out in public in such a state would be near indecent," Hannibal finished evenly, tamping down on his amusement at Will's deepening frown.

"Fuck decency. Wash it off."

"Will -"

Will stalked forward, entirely a predator with a goal in sight, until he was nearly pressed against Hannibal's chest. He could see the Alpha's nose wrinkle at the *wrong* scent of him, could tell from the lack of space between them that Will was all but holding his breath at this distance. He squared Hannibal with a stern stare, his voice low and insistent, so very close to an Alphan Command while still allowing Hannibal the power to dispute it.

"I won't tell you again, Hannibal. *Wash it off.*"

The urge to lean forward, close the distance between them to soothe his Alpha's ire with an affectionate nuzzle was nearly too strong to overcome. But Hannibal knew even this gesture would be unwelcome, smelling the way he did. He had half a mind to release a soft, entreating whine in an attempt to placate Will, but refused this option as well. It had been many, many years since he'd whined for an Alpha, and he'd vowed even then to never do so again.

In the end, Hannibal simply dipped his head in an acquiescing nod before stepping back from Will and toward his ensuite. "As you wish, Will."

Hannibal hadn't told Will of his connection to Margot Verger, making his reaction all the sweeter when they arrived at the venue to find the Omegan sister of the groom greeting guests.

"You look beautiful, as expected," Hannibal smiled and wrapped his arms around her, pressing a gentle kiss to her cheek. He could smell Will's scent grow thick with this new wave of possessive jealousy he'd seemingly developed, and hid his smirk in Margot's hair before pulling away. "Don't you have someone else to handle greeting whilst you properly mingle?"

"The duty of the sister of the groom is never done," Margot laughed, and then turned to Will.

"You must be Will Graham. My dear brother has spoken highly of you, which is rare enough to have me intrigued." She offered her hand, and Will took it, his scent settling slightly now that Margot had moved her attentions from Hannibal.

Will smiled tightly, accepting the handshake. "Where is the lucky groom?" He asked lightly, but Hannibal could sense a thread of tension in his voice that pulled a frown to his lips.

“Which one?” She laughed before continuing. “Oskar is with the caterer but Mason’s around here somewhere, I’m sure.” Margot glanced around distractedly, excusing herself seconds later when someone wearing staff attire tried catching her attention from the corner.

Will pulled Hannibal into an archway off to the side of the room, empty of people and pressed himself close. He licked boldly at Hannibal’s jaw, and rubbed his bare wrists to Hannibal’s neck and wrists, all the while growling low in his throat and grumbling under his breath.

“We really must discuss this newfound possessiveness, Will.” Hannibal teased, but Will’s eyes flashed dangerously when he met Hannibal’s gaze.

“I just want you to smell like me so you’re *safe*, ” Will grumbled, and Hannibal only smiled wider.

“I believe I’ve proven over the last weeks that I’m more than capable of protecting myself, Will. But I’m happy to allow you to scent me. It’s not as though I find your scent unappealing myself.”

Will growled again, pressing Hannibal harder into the wall and molding his body against Hannibal’s own. He knew it was an instinctive protective maneuver as well as a way for the Alpha to spread more of his scent against Hannibal’s skin, but he didn’t protest. He wished they’d had more time to discuss their situation before preparing for the wedding this morning, every fiber of his being feeling so attuned to Will and wanting to address the clear hurt and confusion still evident in the Alpha’s eyes.

Hannibal wasn’t blind. He knew part of the reason for Will’s sudden behavior was fear of losing Hannibal after discovering their connection. He felt responsible for the lingering awkwardness between them and, for the first time since he’d said yes to coming to America with Sutcliffe, he felt shame and regret.

Will seemed to come to his senses when someone walked too close to their hidden, tucked away corner, pulling away from Hannibal and putting some renewed distance between them.

“Will -” Hannibal began, but Will cleared his throat and skimmed his palms down his suit, smoothing out the wrinkles.

“Let’s go find the open bar. The wedding will start soon and we should get our seats.” Will interrupted, turning on his heel and not even pausing to see if Hannibal followed.

The wedding was beautiful; of course it was. Mason cut a rather stunning figure in a bespoke suit, his mate Oskar looking equally well put together in a suit of complementary colors. There was an abundance of pork on the menu, not surprising to Hannibal in the least, and the staff were attentive and kept their glasses constantly full.

Hannibal *was* surprised, however, when he saw Margot directing Mason’s attention to the table he and Will shared and, upon seeing it left empty, scanning the crowd until she found

them where they stood along the fringes of the party, watching in a companionable if not moderately strained silence.

He watched as Mason made his way through the crowd, people parting for him easily as he swayed along with the music. Oskar derailed him for several seconds, the two of them whispering to one another with loving smirks before parting with a sweet, almost chaste kiss, and then Mason was back on their trail. Over the groom's shoulder, Hannibal could see his mate nearly pounce upon Margot as she drifted past, sweeping her out onto the dance floor effortlessly as she tilted her head back and laughed. The two of them looked just at peace with each other as either of them did in the presence of Mason, and Hannibal couldn't deny the bitter twist of jealousy that clenched his stomach at the thought of the Omega having found himself with a mate *and* a family, when for so long Hannibal had wondered if he'd ever have even *one* of the two.

His sullen contemplations were broken up and dissipated by the groom joining them, Hannibal thankful for the distraction the moment his traitorous brain had begun to remind him there was a decent chance he'd already found his optimal mate.

The only problem was, despite his instinctual and sometimes *feral* Alphan tendencies, Will didn't actually *belong* to Hannibal. Even *if* he'd wanted him, Hannibal had made very clear his lack of interest on the subject. He'd likely swat down and drowned any wistful plans Will might have conceived for the two of them together.

"Gentlemen. Thank you so much for coming. Hannibal, always a pleasure. Will, it's been a while!" Mason's words and eyes were mirthful, and Hannibal wondered at what the other man was thinking.

"Several years." Will remarked, putting his glass down on a nearby table before returning his attention to Mason. "That's actually what I came here to talk to you about. There's been some _"

Mason interrupted Will with a loud, abrupt clearing of his throat.

Hannibal watched with slightly narrowed eyes as Mason's gaze moved from Will to him and then back again, a smirk on his lips. "You've brought such a pretty Omega with you and haven't even danced with him once, Willy. No business on my wedding day; go enjoy the festivities and we can meet when I'm back from my honeymoon!"

Mason turned on his heel and left them, Will flushing beautifully at the implication. Hannibal smiled, unable to contain it as he offered his hand to Will, eyebrow raised in challenge. Will looked from his hand to his face, something shifting in his gaze. His scent was warm and comforting, like campfire smoke and pine.

Will took his hand and pulled him close, and Hannibal went easily, falling into Will's arms where he found he fit perfectly. He tried to ignore the clenching in his stomach, convincing himself it was simply his impending Heat. He decided now was as good a time as any to establish his plans with Will, wanting to be upfront with the Alpha.

“I’m close to my Heat.” Will growled softly in response, rubbing his cheek against Hannibal’s. Hannibal chuckled, but pressed on. “There’s a clinic I use; I scheduled with them a week ago when I was certain my Heat was drawing closer. They’re expecting me in the morning.”

Hannibal could feel the tension in Will’s shoulders, and leaned closer to scent him lightly on the cheek. He could imagine, as an Alpha, Will felt compelled to offer his help while also knowing Hannibal’s preference for self-sufficiency and he admired his ability to maintain his control.

Will pulled him closer silently, nodding his understanding and gripping Hannibal even tighter. “I’ll have to find someone else to do my dirty work for a few days I guess, hm?” Will teased after a few seconds of silence, the tension breaking for a moment. Hannibal could smell the contentment on Will, but beneath that was the stress of an Alpha who felt inadequate, and Hannibal found himself wanting to comfort him.

“Just for the week. I tend to have long Heats...” Hannibal trailed off, suddenly all too aware of the implication of his longer Heats. Omegas tended to experience extended Heats when they weren’t knotted by an Alpha, only able to get relief through artificial means. Telling Will his Heats were lengthy was tantamount to telling him he never slept with Alphas during his Heat, and Hannibal could see the brilliant sea-glass of Will’s eyes flash darkly with the knowledge.

“I know you’re not my mate,” Will began slowly, softly, and it felt like the preface to a much grander statement. “I know whatever connection we have is...arbitrary,” Will grit out the word as though it felt thick and stuck within his throat, his brow creasing and lips turning down the moment it was spoken. “All the same, I’d feel better if you’d spend your time at home.” Hannibal opened his mouth to respond, but Will rushed onward as though desperate to speak his peace. “I don’t even need to be near you. I’ll move to the other side of the house and Bev or - or someone else can see to your care. I just -”

Will heaved a sigh, dipping his head down to nuzzle affectionately against Hannibal’s cheek. “I just want you near. *Safe*. I know...you don’t care for my predilection for protection, but you have it all the same. I need you near because...because I worry how my instincts would drive me, should something happen to you.”

Hannibal’s heart stuttered at the admission, his chest near bursting at the thought of his Alpha holding him in such high regard. “Will -”

“I know you’re not my mate,” Will reiterated quickly, “But you’re one of my people. You’re a friend. *Family*. And I just...want to protect you.”

Hannibal leaned forward to nuzzle against Will’s cheek, allowing a reassuring purr to rumble through his chest and vibrate into Will’s where they were pressed together. “I’ve used this Clinic since I arrived in America. It’s reputable with exemplary service and it’s perfectly safe,” Hannibal explained, though he couldn’t help but dip his head down once more to press his nose to the Alpha’s scent glands. “But I appreciate the concern, Alpha.”

The languid pace of Will's steps faltered and froze at the term of respect and submission, and Hannibal felt his cheeks heat as he immediately grew self-conscious, unsure as to *what*, exactly, had factored in to him having graced Will with the title.

Slip of the tongue as it may have been, Will's resulting purr was a low, rhythmic melody that soothed Hannibal immediately, made his chest feel thick and his head grow light. He knew he shouldn't encourage the sentiment, knew it was unfair to Will when neither one of them seemed to *truly* know what they wanted. He knew he should pull away when the melodic tones of the low and sweet love song drew to a close. They even paused, momentarily, when a breath of silence broke through the music, cluttered only with the background noise of the other party guests with which neither of them concerned themselves.

And then the music began to swell once more, another slow song, and instead of pulling back, establishing distance and coherent thought, Hannibal pressed closer and began to sway with Will once more.

His answering purr of contentment slipped from his chest without a thought as they swayed, and Hannibal couldn't find himself to mind about it enough to make an effort to quell it.

Chapter End Notes

Next week is our final chapter! It's a heavy one and is where the attempted noncon is featured. We will mark the specific scene so people can skip it, but the entire chapter sort of has that theme present. Let us know over on Twitter or even in the comments below if you have questions or need spoilers! 💚💜

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains violence and some issues with bodily autonomy. Sutcliffe tries to attack Hannibal while he's in Heat. The worst section has been marked with +++ at the beginning and end, however, the entire chapter has these themes. Let us know if you have questions! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Where’s your beau?”

Will shot Bev a glare across the counter as he flipped over the strips of bacon sizzling away in the pan before him. “He’s not my *beau*,” he snapped irritably, desperately attempting to forget the way the Omega had pressed against them while they’d danced at the wedding.

How he’d curled into Will’s heat in the safety and comfort of Will’s nest that night before slipping away early in the morning, murmuring to a still half-asleep Will that he’d be back in a week, that he’d still be capable of calling on Monday morning to discuss any necessary business from the Clinic.

“Shut up,” Will added for good measure as he turned his attention to the scrambling eggs in the second pan. They were far simpler than Hannibal would ever stand for, simply adorned with salt and cheese and, because Will couldn’t deny that the Omega knew a thing or two about flavors, fresh chives.

“Touchy,” Bev shot back in a sing-song voice, grinning widely and unafraid when Will brandished his spatula in her direction. “Seriously though, he’s not exactly the type to be *late*. Frankly, I’m surprised I’m here *before* him, given that he lives with you and all.”

“He doesn’t *live with me*,” Will argued weakly; he blamed the flaming of his cheeks on residual heat from the stovetop. “He just...lives here,” he corrected mildly. “And anyways he’s not home - here. He checked into a Heat Clinic yesterday.”

He wasn’t sure why Bev’s low whistle in response to that irritated him until she followed it up with, “That’s harsh. Sorry.”

Will scowled at the plates on the counter as he divided the eggs between them. “Sorry for what?”

“Well it can’t be easy being away from your mate during their Heat,” she elaborated, words slow and measured as though she were speaking to a child or an idiot.

The frying pan nearly slipped from Will's grasp at the declaration, his mouth flapping open and closed as his tongue revolted and decided to make only flabberghasted noises of denial.

"He's not my *mate*," Will corrected stubbornly, not remotely believing a word of it. He'd hardly dared to *think* about his recent discovery, even in the privacy of his own mind. How could he hope to *talk* about it, much less to anyone like Bev? There's no way she should have known, and yet...

And yet she had been his friend almost since childhood, had known him through the best and worst and greyest of times for him. Why *wouldn't* she pick up on the fact that Hannibal was the perfect match for her dear friend?

"All the same, he's late now, even via phone call. You're sure he said he'd be able to talk with us this morning?"

Will nodded, his stomach twisting sickly in his gut and then churning all over again when his eyes found the food mounded in sloppy piles on the plates before him. He slid one across the counter to Bev wordlessly and ignored the other, doing his best not to breathe in the scent with his nose where it might turn his stomach all the more.

"He said he would. Hannibal isn't one to let *anything* dictate his life, even a Heat."

Hannibal had been confident he had a few days remaining before his Heat would hit fully, only checking into the clinic a few days early for his own comfort, so when they'd finished their soggy, unfulfilling breakfast and the clock had ticked up to nearly noon, Will got worried.

He only continued to devolve into deeper and deeper concern when his calls and texts went unanswered by the Omega and, by the early afternoon, his calls were going straight to voicemail.

Will finally caved and called the clinic at Bev's behest while she ordered take out for dinner to try and force him to eat, though he wasn't able to even consider it once the clinic had confirmed his already sinking suspicion that the Omega had never checked in. *Something was wrong.*

His Alpha paced at the edges of his mind, frantic and angry. Will was nearly frantic, calling everyone he could think of that may have had contact with Hannibal since the wedding. Nothing. No one had seen him or heard from him.

Bev could sense his desperation, had stayed with him the entire day, and she was clearly concerned, though Will couldn't be bothered to hold back his own overwhelming anxiety in order to soothe her. She called Francis by the time night was settling in, and while they waited for him to arrive, Will called Jack.

"I gave you my word that I'd wait for your intel, Will. And even if you'd failed to give me an update - which you have - my grievance is with you, not your Omega. I wouldn't touch Hannibal and you know that." Jack was quick to assure Will he'd done nothing to Hannibal, and though Will wanted nothing more than a target to shoot at, he believed him.

Even though Will *did* know what Jack said was truth, logic wasn't ruling in his brain. His Alpha was a creature of gnashing teeth and claws, beating itself wildly against the cage of his skull. His throat felt thick with distress, his lungs ached from holding his breath every time the phone rang.

"He's *somewhere*, Jack. People don't just fucking disappear. If he's not at the Heat clinic, and he's not here, someone has him. He wouldn't just leave." Will had to choke back a sob, his traitorous thoughts reminding him Hannibal had lied to him before, that Hannibal *wanted* to leave. To return home. What if he'd found a way?

Will disregarded the notion nearly as quickly as it came, refused to even acknowledge such an option was possible. Hannibal wasn't one to just run away, he would have told Will if he was leaving.

"I'll call around. I know you don't like him, but Sutcliffe is the person Hannibal knows best in Baltimore. I'll see if I can speak with him; he's meant to bring by some paperwork for the funeral company," Jack swallowed thickly enough that Will heard the hitch of his breath down the line and his heart clenched, not just for Jack but also for himself. What would he do if Hannibal wasn't alright? He couldn't even consider it, even after such a short time he knew he wouldn't be the same ever again if that were the case.

He growled in frustration, showing his teeth to Francis who'd just walked in the door. "Fine, Jack. Call him."

Before Will could hang up he heard the Alpha speaking again. "And Will? I know you have a lot going on right now, but I still need that proof before things implode between our organizations. Even with your Omega missing I can't stop the war looming if we can't come to an agreement. Bella was beloved by more than just me. Things may reach a boiling point if my people don't receive justice for her soon."

Will didn't respond, tossing his phone across the room and hissing when it didn't shatter into a million pieces of plastic and glass. Nothing mattered if he couldn't find Hannibal. The entire fucking city could collapse and he wouldn't *care*. Didn't Jack understand?

"Will -" Francis approached, hands calmly held at his sides and pace slow but steady. "I have eyes all over the city searching. If he's here, we'll find him." Bev circled around the two, making her way to the kitchen to keep herself busy putting away uneaten food containers and cleaning the same spot on Will's counter over and over again.

"*He's here*," Will snarled, as though it were obvious, clenching his fists tightly together to avoid doing something rash that he'd regret. He knew Francis was here to help, but Will's Alpha saw everyone who wasn't Hannibal as a potential threat, on high alert for his missing mate. Even Beverly had kept him uneasy all day, his skin prickling uncomfortably. Hannibal would be in Heat in a matter of days if he wasn't already, and every other Alpha, every person standing between them, merely felt like a *danger* to his Omega, despite Will's relationship with them.

"And we'll locate him and bring him home, Will. You aren't good to anybody like this. Have you even eaten today?" Francis looked over Will's shoulder at Bev, and Will could only

imagine the silent communication between them. He always fathered Will, even though Will had been taking care of himself just fine as the leader of his organization for half a decade, and handling his own affairs since he was old enough to hold a gun. The Alpha pulled double duty as another lifelong friend to Will and also someone who'd been around to change his diapers, but it still didn't soothe Will enough to relax in his presence.

Francis finally reached him, still moving slowly but with purpose as he wrapped his warm, broad palm around Will's neck and scruffed him like a pup. Francis was only ever particularly chatty with Will, so it wasn't surprising he'd given up on talking, and he only ever spoke to Will because of the amicable history between their families stretching back since before Will was even born. Francis preferred the silent communication of influential terror and, when that didn't work, brute force with other people, and in this moment he managed to find an in between space in which to soothe Will's frayed nerves. Will wondered absently at what his relationship with Randall looked like, whether they spoke to one another in silent gestures and a stoic companionship. If they understood each other simply by way of being *near* the other man as he and Hannibal seemed to already.

Will melted beneath his touch, Francis' grasp only growing tighter as Will's limbs began to go pliant and lax. His Alpha gave one last feeble attempt at a snarl, showing the white glint of his fangs against his bottom lip before even that was quelled, and his mind went quiet for the first time all day.

"Good pup, let's get you calmed down. You won't find your Omega if you're all worked up." They stood just like that, with Francis cupping Will's neck and applying varying levels of pressure, until Will's front door flew open, one of his guards spilling in behind a blur of motion and limbs.

Francis released him, and Will's anxiety came flooding back full force, now with the added strain of his fight response being kicked up a notch by the intrusion. He moved his body fluidly between Francis, Bev and the front door, stooping into a partial crouch before managing to get a closer look at the mess of limbs in front of him.

"Boss, I'm sorry, I couldn't stop her -" Gerald was panting even as the blur collapsed to the floor at Will's feet. He almost didn't recognize her as she looked up at him through the filthy curtain of her dirty hair, blue eyes shot through with streaks of gold.

"Abigail?"

Abigail Hobbs had long ago come to terms with the fact that she would likely never lead a *normal* life. Her father had seen to that, his affection for her growing over the years first to over-protectiveness and then to obsession. When she was younger, she'd felt his love like the comforting warmth of a quilt wrapped snug around her; safe, secure.

After she presented, that swaddling seemed to grow tighter, more constrictive, until it was suffocating and uncomfortable. He told her often how deeply he loved his only child, how his choking need to have her close grew nearly painful with each year she grew. How difficult it was going to be to see her leave the nest, go to college, find a mate.

When she was fifteen, she developed a crush on an Alpha in her class, and he finally struck up the courage to admit he felt an attraction to her as well. Their little group had remained at a picnic table in the park, not teasing them *too* much when she and Nick slipped away for a walk that conveniently led them into the shelter of the trees. He gave Abigail her first kiss, and her second, and nuzzled her affectionately when she couldn't stop the instinctual purr that rumbled happily in her chest.

She was so distracted that she nearly arrived home late for dinner, bursting through the door breathless and flushed, and when she drew near her dad she could see his nostrils flare, feel the tension that seeped into his frame, the anger that soured his scent. He was brusque all through dinner, his fury collecting and building beneath his skin like a gathering storm, and afterwards he disappeared for the rest of the night, not even bothering to help tidy up as he usually did.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs wasn't much of a drinker, so it was especially startling to Abigail to awaken to her father's weight settling at the foot of her bed in the dead of night, the pungent smell of alcohol roiling off him. His *fatherly speech* was slurred, incoherent at the best of times, but there was one part of it that stuck with Abigail, still haunted her years later; the weepy confession that sometimes her dad thought he might prefer her dead to the idea of losing her to her own independence. To someone *else*.

She didn't see Nick Boyle again after that, withdrawing into herself so that no other Alpha would grow interested enough to pursue her.

It was less than a month later when he roused her from her sleep once more, this time stone cold sober and thrumming with a restless energy. A hunting trip, he'd explained as he ushered her into the car at three in the morning. Impromptu, informal, just the two of them. *Like we used to*, he'd tacked on wistfully, and for a short while, bizarre though the whole thing was, Abigail relaxed into the experience, saturated with nostalgia of her own.

The prey, of course, had been *nothing* like what she was used to. The first of many; placeholders, scapegoats. Innocent lives that Abigail freely traded for her own. And though she carried the guilt of her complicity every day thereafter, she found over the years that the load seemed to grow lighter.

Her mother was blind to it all, though Abigail never got the chance to determine if her blindness was willful or ignorant. Sometimes she wondered which of the two pills would be easier to swallow; that the woman meant to nurture and protect her knowingly left Abigail to her father's sick obsession, or that she didn't pay enough attention to notice how very wrong things had grown.

Her living nightmare ended just after her eighteenth birthday, though her sleep was still plagued with dead girls and her dad's possessive, watchful eyes. Even still, there was a short time wherein her life felt almost *normal* again, the way it hadn't for so many years. She had to know it wouldn't last; chided herself, in retrospect, for being so wistfully silly as to believe it could.

Will was kind to her, did far more for her than was necessary, considering he saved her and orphaned her in equal turns. He was a rock, stable and strong, and a liferaft on the

tempestuous ocean of young adulthood. But he was also absent, so far away with his own business to attend to, and Abigail was so *lonely*. It was too easy to enjoy corresponding with the first person that reached out to her, too foolish to trust her, but Abigail did.

She paid dearly for that mistake, though once more luck graced her at the final hour, and her captors grew overconfident, complacent, lax in the measures they'd first implemented to hold her. Now, with her nose filled with the comforting scent of lemongrass and chamomile and the solid safety of Will's arms around her, Abigail was able to release the iron-tight grip she'd held over her emotions, no longer required to keep a clear head but finally free to face the anxiety and terror that had flooded her veins like poison.

Will held her as she broke apart, and helped to piece her back together when she was ready for him to, just like he always did.

The shower helped, the dirt and scent of toxic Alpha sluicing off her with water and soap, though she was still discomfited by the words that turned in her mind, the lies they had tried to force her to believe. The directive they had tried to will her into completing. It was with a heavy stomach that she finally sat down at the kitchen island while Will swept around the kitchen, frantically attempting to provide more comfort in the form of a hot meal.

"I don't remember you cooking like this, before," she noted as she wrapped her hands around the mug of tea he'd prepared for her.

Will's hands paused between slices of the vegetables on his cutting board, his shoulders tensing slightly. "It's a newer hobby. Besides, Francis ate all the leftovers."

"Someone's out for you, Will," she warned, wishing desperately that she could relax in the protective bubble of her companion's care but knowing instinctively that there was little time for such wistful notions. "Big time."

"I know," he responded, his hands pausing longer as he released a sigh and his shoulders dropped forlornly. "It's been a complete shitshow down here. And I've neglected you for it. Maybe if I hadn't -"

"You couldn't have predicted they'd come for me," Abigail waved away the bitter spiral that threatened to seize the Alpha's thoughts. "Or that I'd be stupid enough to let them."

"Tell me what happened. How'd they find you?"

"How do I know?" Abigail shot back irritably. "One day I made friends with a grad student working on a thesis on youth majoring in the study of Psychology and one night four months later I was drugged and woke up somewhere that turned out to be Baltimore. I wouldn't even have known the grad student was involved, if I hadn't heard her talking while I snuck out."

Will scraped the contents of his cutting board into the sizzling pan on the stove and paused again, his eyes locking onto her across the island and flashing an angry Alphan red. "Did she have red hair? Curly?"

Abigail frowned, something sick twisting in her stomach. "Yeah..."

“Will you can’t think - “ Bev started, but Will pinned her with a gaze and she grew quiet.

“Fucking *Freddie*,” Will growled, slamming the cutting board down onto the counter and eliciting a startled yelp from Abigail. The Alpha softened immediately, embarrassment and shame souring his scent even from across the kitchen. He moved swiftly around the counter separating them, unmindful of the cooking food, and pulled Abigail into a gentle embrace. “I’m sorry. None of this is your fault, you know that, right? I don’t know how they found out about you. I should have protected you better.”

Abigail sighed and melted into Will’s hug, happily taking in his familiar scent. “Will, you’ve done more for me than anyone. You can’t hold the weight of all this yourself. Whoever else was behind all this knows the truth of what happened with my dad. They knew I was the only person they could use to -”

Will drew back, eyebrows furrowed as his mouth drew taut. “To what?”

“They were trying to like...hypnotize me, or something. Make me believe the rumors. That you killed my dad. *And* my mom. That you killed Marissa thinking she was me. That you would kill me too, if you found out I was still alive. ...And that I needed to kill you first.”

The Alpha froze at that, and Abigail could see his clever mind turning over this new information. A moment later, he returned to life, pushing out a heavy breath and muttering, “*Christ*.”

“If you don’t move soon, they’re likely to come at you first.” Francis’ voice rumbled from the doorway of the kitchen, and Will was quick to soothe her when the sudden reappearance of the unfamiliar Alpha made Abigail jump. They both turned toward the voice, anxiety twisting sickly in Abigail’s gut when his dark eyes fell upon her. “They’ll grow desperate, as soon as they realize she’s escaped. Maybe they’ll hold out hope that she broke out to track you down and kill you. But more than likely they’ll fear they didn’t have enough time to properly plant the seed.”

Will let out a low growl at that. “They may even seek to recapture her. See if they can try again. We need to get Abigail out of Baltimore,” Will began, pulling away from her to head back to the hissing pans on the stove. “Not back to Canada. Somewhere else, somewhere safe _”

“She can stay at mine for a few days while we figure things out, she’s a sitting duck here.” Bev offered.

“I don’t care what they have planned for me,” Abigail interrupted, her stomach rolling once more as she recalled the *other* nefarious plan she’d overheard as she fled. “I’m safe enough here, if anywhere, and something worse is about to happen. Where I was being held...I could hear someone else. Another prisoner. It was an Omega, and every time I heard him he was either whining or growling. When I was leaving I could hear them talking...one of them means to force bond the Omega while he’s in Heat. The doctor said he’d tried too early, and Ella - *Freddie* - joked about how they must not be True Mates.”

She'd known she needed to tell Will about this, knew that he wouldn't stand for it to happen, even if the victim was some unknown Omega. It was one of the most abhorrent and unforgivable ways an Omega could be violated, and someone like Will wouldn't dream of not interfering.

She hadn't imagined his reaction would be *quite* as strong as it was, his whole body stiffening, hackles raised, voice a rasping growl as he bared his teeth and snarled, "*Doctor?*"

Abigail swallowed the placative whine that itched to spill from her throat, sensing it would do little to quell the Alpha's fury. "The Alpha that tried to convince me to kill you was a doctor. Chilton?" She recalled the name being spoken by the pompous little Alpha, bestowing his name upon his kidnapped patient as though she should fully know who the everloving fuck he even was. "It was his friend that was after the Omega. Freddie called him Donny."

The broken whine that slipped through Will's growl was as surprising as it was unsettling, distress and fury mingling for dominance.

"It's Sutcliffe. He's got Hannibal."

In hindsight, maybe it would have been safer to bring Francis along as backup, but Will couldn't fathom leaving Abigail alone so soon after she'd been through such a stressful experience, and he needed Bev out on the street talking to people who might know something which meant Francis was his first choice for protector. Even after half an hour of curling on his couch with her covered in blankets that smelled like him and wearing the shirt he'd worn all day, she still had smelled of anxiety and the curdled scent of fear, a faint tremor causing her hands to shake. It made his chest ache and his throat burn with barely held back screams of fury to see her brought so low, a far cry from the happy, flourishing Omega he'd seen during their last video call.

He hated that she'd been dragged back into his life by his enemies, this life wasn't what he wanted for her. But as worried as he was for Abigail, his stomach was in knots of worry for his *Omega*.

He knew with a conviction he couldn't fully explain that Hannibal had been taken by Chilton and his crew just like Abigail had, he was absolutely certain the Omega she referred to had been *his Omega*. Before he'd left her with Francis she'd told him the Omega had smelled dangerously close to Heat before she'd managed to escape, and it had taken her nearly the entire day to make her way as inconspicuously as possible across the city and to his house.

Which meant it had now been an entire day of Hannibal being trapped with *Sutcliffe*. Will's lips curled back in a snarl at the mere thought of the other man, his blood boiling that this rival had thought himself even remotely worthy of Will's mate and had *taken him*.

After what felt like far too long for the Alpha pacing furiously in his mind Will stood in front of the warehouse Abigail had described and Francis had confirmed having belonged to Chilton.

Will walked in brazenly, without even coming up with a plan of action, compelled by his instincts to find his Omega and cover him in his scent, make sure he was safe and provided for before his Heat. It took only minutes for Will to search the entire building, only barely lingering whiffs of Hannibal's thick Heat scent remaining in the space.

He was gone. They all were. And Will was back at square one.

"Will," a voice echoed behind him, and Will turned on his heel with a growl, only barely managing to keep himself from lunging for Jack.

"What are you doing here? Were you a part of this?" Will seethed through clenched tight teeth that longed to sink into Jack's throat and rip and tear until he was soaked with his blood.

Jack sneered at the accusation, huffing. "I told you I'd see no harm come to your Omega, Will. I didn't do this, but I know who did. I went to your house first to tell you what I heard, wasn't exactly a warm welcome with the Dragon looming in the doorway and a timid little Omega peering over his shoulder. Abigail Hobbs; I remember her from when she was just a pup. Is that the evidence you had, Will? The trump card to help you prove you didn't hurt my Bella?"

"If you came here to talk business, Jack, I'm sorry, but it's not the fucking time. Abigail proves my point though, neither of us had anything to do with the pain wrought on one another. It was Chilton all along, encouraged by Freddie and controlled by Sutcliffe who has a deranged notion in his head that he and Hannibal are mates." Will barely managed to speak the words, they left his mouth feeling thick and too full, and coated his tongue in what tasted like ashes.

"I overheard a call at Chilton's earlier, I'm sure it was about your Omega. I don't doubt you anymore, Will."

"Well they aren't here anymore, so clearly they've caught wind of me knowing and they moved Hannibal. But where would they take him?" Jack hesitated to respond, giving Will a considering glance. "If you know something Jack, tell me."

They stood in silence for several long seconds until Jack sighed. "Chilton's compound. It's the only other place in the city they could take him with any level of security."

"Are you coming?" Will was already moving towards the door, Jack at his back. His Alpha grumbled restlessly at having a rival at their back, but Will ignored the instinct in favor of walking faster, Hannibal was still out there and he *needed Will*.

+++

Even through the muzzle that had been strapped to his face, Hannibal could smell the sharp flint and ash scent of an angry Alpha coming off Donald in waves as the man approached him in his pitiful makeshift nest. He'd been given some towels and cheap newly bought bedsheets

to try and make a serviceable space for him to spend his Heat, but nothing smelled right. None of it smelled like *Will*, and it left a hollow ache between Hannibal's ribs.

He hadn't expected to miss the Alpha so intensely, but every fiber of his being cried out for his Alpha, and he knew it wasn't all only because of his rapidly approaching Heat. Sutcliffe's lip was curled in a snarl, his ire thick and overwhelming in the enclosed space; Hannibal closed his eyes and conjured the sight of Will's lopsided grin, strode through the halls of his Memory Palace in search of the warm, soothing scent of cloves and fresh herbs that he'd both come to know and known his whole life.

They'd moved Hannibal to a new location and he'd only just managed to get his nest rebuilt with the paltry offerings when Sutcliffe had shown up again, now even angrier than he'd been that morning when he'd tried to force bond Hannibal and failed.

Hannibal knew they weren't True Mates, the entire purpose of the biological imperative of True Mates was that each Alpha and Omega had one perfect creature out in the world for them, one match that would have the strongest genetics and the best chance of survival. It was only a more modern notion that had romanticized the concept, and Sutcliffe was neither his biological equal nor his perfect person. He already had Will, and he'd told him he didn't want him.

The reminder clogged up his throat and pulled a dangerous wetness to his eyes. He refused to break down, not in front of these brutes, and certainly not over this situation. He would recover. And if Sutcliffe managed to force bond him during his Heat, he'd still kill him either way and be rid of the man forever. But something within him clung to the notion that Will would find him, that his Alpha could rescue him.

He tossed it away, needing to focus on planning his escape, but still held the idea close to his chest even if he no longer allowed himself to dwell on it.

"It seems your body is being disagreeable so close to your Heat, Omega. I'll need to wait to bond with you until you're fully in Heat, a matter of a day or less." Sutcliffe's voice was hard, his anger obvious and close to the surface.

He grabbed hold of the chain that stretched between Hannibal's bound wrists, tugging him closer and his hands down to a safe distance as his other hand formed a fist in Hannibal's hair, already lank with sweat and heavy against his skull as his body temperature continued to rise to the optimal heat for conception. He crouched down before him, forcing Hannibal's muzzled face closer until it was pressed into the crook of Donald's neck, nestled just against the Alpha's scent gland and unable to take a single breath without also breathing in the putrid pheromones that urged the Omega to relax, *submit*.

"I think we can move this along a little faster, don't you?" Donald murmured as Hannibal struggled weakly against his hold.

It was no use; Hannibal's fangs were useless to him, trapped away behind a thick layer of plastic, and with his arms and legs chained together as they were he didn't have enough range of movement to find any leverage that could assist him. Combining that with his body's

weakening state, the strain of barrelling into Heat without having had any time to prepare himself, to eat and drink his fill to bolster himself on fuel and calories...

Hannibal had only felt so helpless once before in his life. Things hadn't ended well for his captors, then. He could only hope that if history were forced to repeat itself, that bit would hold true as well.

"You'd be better off to relax and let it take you," Sutcliffe murmured as the hand in Hannibal's hair drifted down to scruff the nape of his neck, forcing even more pliancy from his weakened body. "I'd hate to sour your lovely scent with hormone boosters to push you that final stretch, but I will, Omega. I'll do whatever's needed to make you mine once and for all."

Hannibal lashed out with all his fury and resentment, his body thrumming with the pure embodiment of *hate*. It was only a weak twitching in the hold of the Alpha, and Donald's low, cruel chuckle slid like ice down Hannibal's hot spine.

"Don't give me that wounded act. I gave you all the chances in the world, Hannibal. For *years* I tried to prove myself to you; courted you, kept you housed and fed. I showed you the life I could offer you and you took it all while giving *nothing back*. Nothing but deceit and secrets," the grip on Hannibal's nape tightened painfully, and Hannibal couldn't stop the plaintive, panicked whine that bubbled from his throat, muffled by the barrier around his mouth but no less humiliating.

"Practicing behind my back. *Illegally*," he gave a slight jerk of his hand, his fingers slipping from the key points on Hannibal's body that forced submission in Omegas, and Hannibal renewed his squirming at full force. Donald snarled, pushing his weight into Hannibal until he was forced to topple back into his pathetic little nest, the Alpha's weight atop him, holding him down.

"Taking up with another Alpha, disappearing for *days* on end," he snarled, wrenching Hannibal's head to the side to growl against his neck, his mouth hovering over the fresh wound that he'd inflicted just that morning; a desperate attempt to force bond him, biting far too early into the symptoms of Heat as though to prove that, should it take, Hannibal *had* always been meant for him.

As though to prove that *Hannibal* was the one that was wrong all along. Stubborn, willful Omega, being put in his place by force from his True Mate.

Oh, how Donald must have *loathed* that that wasn't the case.

Hannibal's stomach clenched in hunger, he hadn't eaten since the wedding and no one had considered bringing him food. Nothing more than a drugged glass of water had been given to him since his capture.

An idea formed, coming to fruition faster than he could nearly process in his haze, and he allowed himself to be held close, falling limp in the Alpha's hold.

“Alpha,” he whimpered miserably, only partially exaggerating how exhausted he sounded. “I’m so hungry, Alpha.”

“Yes, I imagine your body is craving nourishment to prepare for your Heat. I plan to have you knotted for the entirety, bred by the end. Shall I go get you something? Can you behave yourself?”

Hannibal groaned again, but nodded his head against Sutcliffe’s neck, turning his face more fully into the crook of his shoulder as though seeking comfort.

“Chilton has been such an accommodating host. I’m sure I can procure you something fitting for your Heat. Be good, sweet Omega. I’ll return to you shortly.”

Hannibal whined once more for good measure, curling in on himself as soon as Donald stepped away from him.

He knew he would have only minutes to prepare for the Alpha's return, scrambling to hide himself from any potential cameras that might be recording his movements. As an emergency doctor and surgeon, Hannibal had set plenty of broken bones or dislocated parts, but he’d never intentionally dislocated his own before.

He steadied himself, taking several breaths and centering his mind as best he could while it burned with his fever, preparing himself. He had a high tolerance for pain, but his body was already in a heightened state of awareness and alarm, and dislocating his own thumb would require a steady hand.

He wrapped his fingers around the digit, navigating around the cuffs, and *yanked*. The pain was swift, but it did the trick, his joint popping. He tested the give of the restraints with this new development, and found he was able to slip free.

He returned his hands to their previous positions, content in the knowledge that once he was ready, he would have access to one hand. And one hand would be all he needed to execute the rest of his plan.

Donald didn’t leave him for long, Hannibal imagined the Alpha was growing restless with his need to placate an Omega so close to Heat, the man settling back down in Hannibal’s nest with him once he returned with a plate of fruits, vegetables and easily eaten finger foods. It was a far cry from the prepackaged home cooked meals Hannibal usually brought to the clinic with him during his Heats, but he would happily accept whatever nourishment he could to keep his body strong enough to resist.

Hannibal purposefully failed to feed himself, making his hands clumsy and creating a mess. Donald tutted at him softly and scooped up a rolled up piece of meat, using his other hand to free Hannibal from his muzzle. “Shall I feed you, pet? Will you be good for me? Let me take care of you?”

Hannibal whined and curled his body closer to Sutcliffe, forcing himself not to recoil when the other man purred for him and brought the meat to Hannibal’s lips. He accepted the offering delicately, chewing slowly while Donald prepared another bite.

“We will be so good together, Hannibal. You’ll see once this is all over. We were made for each other.”

Hannibal let him feed him for several minutes, lulling the Alpha into a false sense of security while also providing his body with the fuel needed to sustain him. He was hours away from Heat, maybe even less, the stress of being held hostage enough to push him into an early Heat.

After what felt like hours, but was only mere minutes, Donald turned his body away from Hannibal in order to put the plate to the side and pick up a glass of water. Hannibal lunged for him, slipping his battered hand free from its restraint and grabbing tightly onto the Alphas neck, keeping him held in place.

Donald might be an Alpha, but Hannibal was strong, even this close to Heat he had the wherewithal to pin the Alpha below him, straddle his thighs and keep him held in place.

There were angry words spilling from his mouth, but they all faded into white noise as Hannibal propelled himself forward and sank his fangs into Sutcliffe’s neck, biting down until he felt his teeth connect in the other man’s flesh and then *ripping*. He tasted iron thick and heavy in his mouth, dripping down his chin, but still he returned, biting again.

He kept up the assault until Donald’s murmured, gasping cries finally faded to a roaring silence, blood staining everything from Hannibal’s face and chest to his nest and the floor.

He moved quickly, using his now free hand to remove the rest of his restraints, tossing the forgotten muzzle to the other side of the room and crawling towards the open door. He didn’t know how long he had before someone else might come, and he was rapidly devolving.

Hannibal only made it halfway to the door before collapsing, his stomach clenching hotly and slick slipping from his body to coat his thighs. He had probably an hour, maybe even less before he’d be nearly useless, and he couldn’t imagine trying to navigate Baltimore safely in his present condition. Already he felt nearly dizzy with a simmering arousal, thoughts clouded and mind full of cotton.

He crawled back to his pathetic, miserable nest, curling tightly around himself as he settled in, prepared to ride out his Heat in the only familiar place he knew in this strange environment.

+++

“You go in first,” Will directed, staring at the security camera perched above the main entrance from the passenger seat of Jack’s SUV.

“Will -” Jack began, and Will snarled at the hint of argument in the single syllable.

“*You’re* the one with the alliance,” Will accused in a hiss.

“Not anymore,” Jack reminded him firmly. “I told Chilton I was backing off you after our talk last week.”

Talk was a rather mild way of putting it - his ribs still rebelling with a breath-stealing throb from time to time - but Will let it slide, more focused on the anger that made his veins burn and the anxiety that had his stomach twisted in a knot, his lungs restricted by half. “Your turning away from the initial plan sparked this desperate attempt to part me from my mate,” Will observed, and it wasn’t an accusation, even though it would have been very satisfying to have the one responsible within his reach at that very moment.

Jack had nothing to say to that, perhaps agreeing in his silence. Will heaved a sigh. “They’ll still be more welcoming of *you* turning up at their door than *me*. ”

“Go up the street a bit and double-back along the west wall,” Jack suggested, his eyes scanning that edge of the house and then further down the street. “You should be able to sidle right up to the front door, just under the camera’s blindspot if you stay close to the wall.”

Will nodded his agreement, unhooking his seatbelt and making to exit the vehicle. He paused with his hand on the door handle, his gaze flitting across the tight space of the car to pin Jack with a hard stare. Already he could feel his fangs itching to spill, his eyes stinging as Alpha red invaded his crystalline blue irises.

“I hope you know I’m not intending to take any prisoners.”

The other Alpha’s mouth was a tight line, his expression reluctant but eyes unquestioning. “I can’t say I wouldn’t be the same, if it were Bella in there. But don’t forget we’re not just here for Hannibal. I still need answers regarding *my* mate, Will. And her unnecessary death.”

Will ran his tongue over his teeth as he considered this, edging the tip of one fang until the taste of iron blossomed over his tastebuds. “Sutcliffe was only ever after Hannibal. And Chilton isn’t clever enough to hatch such a scheme on his own. Though he *is* stupid enough to go along with it, if he thinks it may benefit his standing in the end. That only leaves Lounds.”

“So Freddie lives,” Jack confirmed, and the Alpha within Will raged at even *that* small concession.

“For now,” he growled lowly, yanking on the handle and slipping out of the SUV and down the street.

He did as Jack suggested and meandered down the street casually, doubling back halfway down the block and slinking through a neighboring yard to edge closer to Chilton’s estate. He found the west corner of the house just as Jack began to ascend the front stoop, and shifted slowly toward the front door with his body pressed against the wall, his eyes trained on the camera positioned above the doorway.

Jack knocked just as Will reached his side, his back pressed flush against the brick just to the right of the doorway. “I’m here to see Dr. Sutcliffe,” Jack informed whomever answered the door.

“I’ve been informed that Dr. Sutcliffe is unavailable for company at the moment,” the housekeeper sounded surprisingly regretful, and Will had to choke down on the snarl that threatened to break free from his throat at the thought of what might be keeping the good doctor.

“He was meant to bring my mate’s paperwork by this morning, but he didn’t show up,” Jack informed her, his tone a perfect mix of pleasantly understanding and rightfully irritated. “I’m afraid it’s quite a time-sensitive matter, so I’d appreciate being able to collect it now. I’m sure he’s got it with him; he told me he’d be staying here for the foreseeable future. I understand he’s a busy man, but the morgue said her death certificate was in his possession.”

“I’ll - I’ll see if I can track it down for you,” the Beta assured him.

It mustn’t have been easy for him, but throwing down the dead wife card had certainly pulled the odds in Jack’s favor. She ushered him in and immediately took her leave, and Will slipped in as well at Jack’s signal.

His nose crinkled at the overwhelming stench of *Chilton* as he entered, his fangs only itching all the more to spill the blood of such an unpalatable man.

“You’ve been here before,” Will pointed out. “Where would they be keeping him?”

“The bedrooms are upstairs; that’s a likely possibility. He’s also been known to carry out his more *distasteful* business in the basement. Though I know he has a functioning attic as well.”

“So search the whole fucking house, is what you’re saying,” Will snapped with an irritated growl. He didn’t have *time* to search top to bottom. He needed to know where Hannibal was *now*.

“I’ll stay here and wait for them to bring Sutcliffe. Go find your Omega, Will.” It’s a dismissal, but Will accepted it nearly gratefully, slipping into the shadows of a side hallway and following the lingering scent of his Omega, the smell faint but present even beneath the overwhelming stench of Chilton within the space.

He tried several doors along the hallway, many of them locked but with no discernable sounds coming from behind them, the others leading into the closets or bathrooms. Hannibal’s scent grew fainter as Will approached the end of the hall, and Will doubled back, realizing he’d gone the wrong way.

After what felt like hours, but he knew was only minutes, he managed to find a staircase, the scent stronger there. He followed it up to the second floor landing, and was immediately faced with Chilton emerging from one of the rooms, the brief glimpse behind him showing a study.

“How did you get in here?” Chilton’s eyes narrowed as he took in Will’s form on the top stair, the other man going for his phone, most likely to call security.

Will moved before he’d even thought to, his fingers like claws where they wrapped around Chilton’s wrist, shaking him until he dropped the phone and it shattered against the hardwood

floor. "You have something of mine and I intend to see it returned to me."

"What is it about that damned Omega that has the two of you losing your reason? He can't possibly be worth it." Chilton's tone was scornful, but Will could hear the very real curiosity.

"Where's Hannibal? You have one chance to take me to him." Will had no intention of letting Frederick escape this with his life, but he would allow the Alpha to believe it if it meant finding Hannibal sooner. Already the scent of a distressed, in Heat Omega was growing stronger, and Will knew he must be close to his mate.

"I imagine he's somewhere around here attached to Donald's knot, the little whore. He's a desperate, needy thing isn't he? Just the same as his fellow Omegas in that regard." The words were scathing, but Will could sense the longing beneath them, Chilton growing desperate as he continued to grow older without a mate.

Will was lightening fast, snapping Chilton's wrist back enough to hear the satisfying *crunch* of bones grinding together enough to break, Frederick's cries piercing through the relative silence of the house. He didn't hesitate, darting forward to take the Alpha's throat between his teeth and then *ripping*, tearing at flesh that parted far too easily for his fangs. His Alpha howled his contentment, bashing himself against the cage of Will's mind until Will finally pulled away from the bloody, ragged wound.

Chilton was still alive, and Will suddenly couldn't bear to put his lips to the man's flesh again, unwilling to take anymore of him into his body. He smoothly pulled his gun from his waistband and shot Frederick between the eyes, the heavy weight of him crumpling to the ground in an undignified heap. The gunshot had been nearly enough to drown out the sound of a scream, but Will still managed to hear it, turning on his heel and leaving Chilton behind, running headfirst towards the sound.

He arrived at the scene right as Jack did, his nostrils flaring at the overwhelming, cloying stench of an Omega dangerously close to Heat. He growled at Jack's proximity, squaring his body to fight off the rival Alpha if necessary.

The woman who'd opened the door for Jack stood in the open doorway of a room that reeked of distressed Omega, and once Will managed to peel his eyes from Jack for long enough he was able to see what had caused the reaction.

Sutcliffe was on the floor, surrounded by a thick, crimson pool of blood and very clearly dead. His gaze found Hannibal a half second before Jack did, the other Alpha stepping back and dragging the maid along with him. Will could see from the corner of his eye the flash of metal as a pair of keys were tossed to the floor. "Take the car, Will. Get him out of here. I'll find Freddie and *ask her some questions.*"

Will would be thankful later, when his Alpha wasn't snarling and snapping its bloodied jaws at the too close feel of another Alpha, especially when he could *see* his Omega curled into a tight ball in a filthy, makeshift nest. His fingers were claws in his palms, digging deep gouges into his skin until he smelled copper.

When he looked up Jack and the maid were gone, and all he could see was Hannibal. He went to him immediately, falling to his knees beside the other man, pulling him to his body even as Hannibal fought him off.

“Shh, sweet Omega. It’s just me, it’s Will.” He didn’t call himself Hannibal’s Alpha, he wasn’t that, not yet. He tried to keep his voice calm, soothing, even though every fiber of his being wanted to scream his frustrations and howl in celebration of finding his Omega in equal measure.

“Will?” Hannibal turned in Will’s arms, blinking up at him blearily before collapsing into Will’s hold, his body going totally lax as he rubbed his face against every part of Will he could reach. “I killed him.”

Will growled at that, following it up with a soothing, rumbling purr at the sharp spike in Hannibal’s scent. “I’d kill the entire city before I would let him touch you. You were so good, Omega. Did everything just right.” Will praised him, holding Hannibal by his nape to calm him while also turning his nose into Will’s throat, letting him take his fill of Will’s scent.

“I wanted to come to you but I couldn’t leave, I’m too close...” Hannibal trailed off, rubbing his wrists absently against Will’s own, covering himself in the scent of his Alpha. It made something in Will’s chest ache and his stomach clench with his need to cover his mate and protect him.

“I have a car, sweetheart. I’m going to get you out of here, take you wherever you want to go. Do you want me to take you to the clinic?” Even now, even after a day of separation and desperation, Will wouldn’t force himself on the Omega. If Hannibal didn’t want him to help him through his Heat he would take him without question to the clinic and help him check in as he’d intended.

“No,” the response was more of a growl than a word, the Omega’s molten gold eyes turning to pin Will in place, something like anger burning in his irises at the mere suggestion. “Take me home, Alpha.”

Hannibal had stopped fighting fate days ago, the night Will discovered the depth of what stretched between them and bared his fangs to Hannibal in hurt and anger when he grew to understand the Omega fate had tied him to had consciously decided to remain apart from him.

Will’s emotional distress sliced across Hannibal’s every nerve like a thousand little paper cuts just as much as his physical pain did, and it was mere hours after their disagreement that Hannibal had found himself stirred from the cold, uncomfortable trappings of his own nest to seek comfort in another.

And then the wedding, and Will had grown a fierce, possessive streak Hannibal had no wish to curb, publicly scent-marking him and relaying to all that cared to witness that, though unmated, Hannibal was *not available*. Later in the night, Will had held him close as they danced, nosing as discreetly as he could manage into Hannibal’s hair, against his neck;

holding him close and swearing to protect him, should Hannibal choose not to go through with his appointment at the Heat Clinic.

Once more, when faced with the kindness and devotion of the Alpha Hannibal couldn't keep off his mind, the Omega instead decided to retreat; sticking to his plan, keeping his appointment with the Clinic.

Nearly paying a dear price for it.

That he was able to *subdue* his captor before irreparable damage could be done was a gift of fate, something he almost felt he shouldn't have been granted. He'd had the one biology had marked for him *in his arms*, and he did nothing but pull away, pretend to be blind. What more did he deserve, but to remain beholden to the Alpha that had brutishly inserted himself into Hannibal's life? To be bonded to Donald - even if not by choice - almost seemed a fitting punishment, bestowed upon him by Fate itself.

He freed himself from the looming threat of the unworthy Alpha, though did little beyond that, unable to escape the pitiful nest he'd cobbled together for himself as his Heat drew ever near. But then his Alpha appeared, as though drawn to him by only his fervent desire to have Will near. His heart sang with the proximity to the Alpha, his bodily aches and hazy mind reduced almost immediately as he drew in Will's delicious, calming scent, pressed himself into his body to feel the Alpha's heat, his heartbeat, the protective cage his arms made as they wrapped around Hannibal.

To be so close to the Alpha and yet so far removed - exiled to the backseat of the SUV, *reeking* of an unfamiliar Alpha, while Will drove them home - was nearly unbearable. He choked down on the whine that stung his throat and buried his face in the shirt Will had graciously left with him, opting to go topless in the concerted effort to keep Hannibal placated while he couldn't remain close.

He must not have been as successful in the action as he'd hoped, or Will could sense that his unease at their distance was growing as his body hurdled ever onward into the inescapable throes of Heat, because Will made a soothing sound from the front seat and found Hannibal's eyes in the rearview mirror.

"I know, baby. Just a bit longer, now. You're doing so good for me. Just try to relax."

Hannibal clutched Will's shirt closer still, closed his eyes and buried his nose into it. He focused on his breathing, the seven second in-hold-out count nearly straining the tenuous grasp he still held on his attention. Even so, he found himself calming, his pounding heart slowing and muscles previously coiled with a tense wariness relaxing bit by bit, until he was nearly brainless and drifting on the sea of Will's scent, curled into a ball in the back of an SUV that provided a steady rocking to complete the illusion.

He was drawn to vague awareness at the sound of the back door opening, moreso when Will's scent washed over him stronger than ever, his arms - warm despite their lack of clothing - wrapping around him and hauling him gently from the backseat. Hannibal let out a soft whine and clung to the Alpha, burying his face into the man's neck and breathing deep his scent from the source.

“-mine?”

“Hm?” Hannibal hummed sleepily, digging claws into cogent thought and pulling it forcibly toward him. His Alpha had asked him something and he’d missed it; he needed to pay better attention.

“Do you want your nest or mine?” Will asked again gently.

Hannibal nuzzled his face into Will’s neck, feeling almost tipsy with the pleasant haze of Heat that hung over him as he let loose a deep purr from his chest. “Yours,” he answered. And, because he knew that even now Will would do his best to respect Hannibal’s autonomy and surrender his nest completely if Hannibal asked him to, clarified, “With you, Alpha. Don’t leave me.”

Will’s grasp stiffened around him in surprise, though he let out his own rumbling purr at the response, rubbing his cheek against Hannibal’s as much as he could as he delivered them both safely up the stairs. “I’ll stay with you,” he swore, voice soft and earnest.

And soon Hannibal found himself melting as he entered a room that was only *Will*, falling lax into the nest he was laid into gingerly even as he greedily tugged his Alpha down beside him.

Hannibal flipped onto his stomach after a few minutes of cuddling close, rutting mindlessly against the sheets even as Will held him tighter, making his movements stuttered and difficult. Hannibal whined fitfully, his Heat fully descending on him but still allowing him to remain more lucid than he typically found himself. He wondered idly if True Mates had this effect on one another, but gave up thinking on it too deeply when he was finally able to brush his cock *just so* against the mattress.

“Shh, sweet Omega. I’ll stay here with you for as long as you need. I’ll protect you, nourish you. I’ll be here to hold you in between it all if that’s what you want -” Hannibal’s whine turned nearly petulant, a purely Omega sound which he’d never before made. He managed to coordinate his limbs enough to climb into Will’s lap, brushing their cocks together through their clothing and pinning the Alpha with his gaze. He was certain his eyes were pure, molten gold at this point, his brain a haze of pleasure sensations going off in tandem as electricity sparked up his spine and coursed through his veins at the touch of their bodies.

Will hissed through clenched tight teeth, and Hannibal leaned low to lick against his Alpha’s mouth, taking his bottom lip between his teeth and nipping sharply enough to pull another sound from the man, this one a heady mix of pleasure and surprised pain.

Will’s hands settled tentatively on Hannibal’s hips, and Hannibal ground down more firmly against Will’s groin, his cock stirring beneath Hannibal’s undulations. “I want *you*, Alpha. All of you. Need your knot.” Hannibal pleaded, a placating purr trailing after.

Hannibal sighed in contentment when Will’s fingers turned to claws on his waist, keeping him held firmly in place as Will thrust experimentally up, groaning when their cocks slotted together so perfectly. “Okay, alright.” Will replied breathlessly, as though he needed to convince them both that this was real.

He couldn't help but to kiss the Alpha again, this time lingering for longer against plush lips, eventually prying Will's mouth open and licking behind his teeth. He could still taste the sharp flavor of iron against Will's tongue, and wondered for the first time since their escape about the fate of Chilton.

"Did you kill for me, Alpha?" Hannibal purred, moving to pull off the tattered remains of his clothes and get to work on Will's. By the time he'd finished undressing them both, Will was looking at him with a nearly feral intensity.

"Yes," Will growled, the sound low and dangerous in his throat as his eyes flooded red, swallowed entirely in a sea of blood. "He helped Sutcliffe take you, hurt you. I couldn't allow him to live." Will sounded so earnest, even through the rage trembling through his voice, and it made something in Hannibal's chest ache and his stomach clench with a fresh wave of arousal.

"You're so good to me, Will. Such a perfect Alpha," Hannibal moaned into Will's neck, licking absently at his scent gland, the place where, if they were to bond, Hannibal would mark him.

Will tensed beneath him, and Hannibal could sense the Alpha wanted to flip them, wanted to push Hannibal down onto his stomach and mount him, breed him, as nature instinctually drew him to do. But Will didn't move, remaining perfectly still beneath Hannibal and letting him explore his body at his own leisure, eyes fluttering closed and pulse increasing as Hannibal trailed his lips down Will's neck and to his chest, nipping and sucking at the newly exposed flesh.

He rolled his hips against Will's, their now bare and leaking cocks rubbing together with a harsh friction that only intensified their arousal. Hannibal caught Will's gasp with his mouth and drank it down, slipping his tongue between the Alpha's lips as he shifted his lower half to settle more fully over Will's groin, until he could rock against the Alpha's thick shaft and let it slip between his slick-drenched thighs and cheeks.

"You would kill for me again," Hannibal accused, a low, constant purr rumbling through his words.

"Yes," Will admitted, his hands forming claws around Hannibal's hips and holding him steady as he worked his body in time with Hannibal's gyrations.

"Do anything I asked of you," Hannibal continued, his own voice catching slightly when Will's cockhead caught teasingly against his rim for a moment.

"Anything, Omega," Will agreed breathlessly, gazing up at him with the softest look he'd ever seen from irises flooded Alphan red. "Hannibal, I -"

Whatever was to be said was lost to Will's groan, breathless and surprised and nearly *painful* as Hannibal guided the Alpha's cock to his entrance in earnest and began the process of slipping down the length of it.

"Fuck!" Will whined immediately, though he *did* find the wherewithal to edge the helpless sound into a fierce growl as he stared up at Hannibal, bared his fangs and demanded, "Don't stop."

"I wouldn't even consider it, Alpha," Hannibal murmured, lips twisting into a playful smile as he settled onto Will fully and then immediately started rocking his hips greedily.

Will felt *so good* inside him, filling that cavernous space that had sat empty and waiting for nearly Hannibal's entire life, amplified in intensity during his unsatisfying Heats, of course. He used Will's thick cock to tilt his hips and grind pressure against his prostate, moaning unabashedly as his Alpha satisfied every urge Hannibal's body could present him with.

All the while, he marvelled at the man beneath him, at how *right* it felt to have this connection with Will. He knew he was well into his Heat by now, even for the first day. Well past the time he'd be writhing in agony on sterile sheets and shoving the biggest artificial knot the Heat Clinic could provide him with into his wanting hole with little satisfaction. Delirious until finally finding release, when his faculties would return enough for him to eat and drink the supplies brought to him by the Betas who worked there.

He'd never been so deep into a Heat before and also so *aware*. Aware of every moment of his skin against Will's, of his Alpha buried inside him and panting with pleasure. What's more, he knew he would *remember* this. Remember every overwhelmed, helplessly adoring look Will cast up at him. Every tender caress and gentle squeeze of his hands on Hannibal's flesh. He would remember this, remember *Will*.

All the better, then, that this was their first time being so intimate. Hannibal felt himself able to let go of any preconceived notion or assumption, any lingering doubts or fears. Will was inside him, Will was *a part* of him. And Will was his, in mind and spirit, at least, if not so officially by claim of blood.

He registered Will's lips moving before the words being breathed from them reached Hannibal's awareness. Words like *beautiful* and *perfect* making the Omega within him preen with contentment and pride; *don't stop* and *so fucking good* filtering into his mind as well, and he purred with the satisfaction of knowing that his mate was enjoying the way they fit together just as much as Hannibal was.

Hannibal rocked on Will's cock with abandon, fingers digging into the Alpha's chest hard enough to bruise as he chased the fulfillment he sought, teased himself with the Alpha's swelling knot. He couldn't stop the soft whine that slipped from his throat when he realized it wasn't enough, that there was something missing.

Will gave a disgruntled whine as well when Hannibal stilled his movements, considering the growing need he sensed building in his core, flooding over every inch of his skin. The Alpha made a noise of protest when Hannibal pulled off of him, placated quickly when he bent low to capture Will's lips in a needy, breathless kiss and told him, "I need you against me. Covering me. I need you to mount me, Alpha. Will you please?"

It was all the invitation Will had needed, apparently, his restrained body springing into action to clutch at Hannibal, rolling them until Hannibal was pinned beneath him and then guiding

his Omega to turn onto his stomach. Hannibal groaned again as his leaking cock met the mattress, giving a few aborted thrusts against it until Will's claws dug into his hips and hauled them up, forcing him to present.

"Thought about this so many times," Will confided, an eager whine sharpening his tone. He clutched at Hannibal's hip with one hand, running the other reverently along the swell of his ass and up the dip of his spine. "Never let myself believe I could have it."

"You can," Hannibal reminded him. "So have it," he encouraged demandingly. The fingers that clutched his hip spasmed reflexively, Will's other hand departing from Hannibal's skin to line himself up to his dripping hole.

"This what you're after, Omega?" Will asked teasingly as he slipped inside, pressing forward unrelentingly until he was buried to the hilt. He draped himself over Hannibal's back, letting his weight fall heavy upon the Omega beneath him until he was pinning him into the mattress, only Hannibal's hips pulled away from the bed in a strategic and traditional position. "Want me to hold you down and split you open?" He asked, his voice gone nearly feral with the growl that cut through his every word.

He nipped at Hannibal's earlobe where his mouth rested and then rubbed his cheek against Hannibal's own, against his temple and down his neck. "Do you want my knot, baby?" He asked, the question spilling directly into Hannibal's ear on his hot breath. "You can have it, you know. Whenever you damn well want."

"Now," Hannibal snarled, arching his body to press back into where Will was slowly thrusting into him. "Knot me, Will. Make me come, Alpha, *please*."

There was a time when Hannibal might have found his proclamations embarrassing. Certainly he had seen an adult film or two and wondered as to *who* in the world would be so obvious, so eagerly giving voice to their desires, to give direction or beg their partners for release. With Will, he didn't consider such things. All he knew was that Will was an Alpha and someone that seemed shockingly similar to Hannibal, and that their biology seemed to indicate that they were True Mates.

Will snarled against Hannibal's ear at the directive, his sweaty chest pressing even tighter against Hannibal's back as his hips began aborted, rabbiting thrusts, his knot growing ever larger and catching on Hannibal's rim more and more with each stroke until finally it was pressed inside entirely, Will groaning again as Hannibal's body responded instinctually and clenched around it, pulling the seed from the Alpha mounting him.

The feeling of fullness and the unceasing pressure on his prostate forced Hannibal's orgasm from him within seconds of Will's, Hannibal's body clenching even tighter around the Alpha, triggering another rolling orgasm from Will as his cock twitched and pulsed nearly violently within Hannibal's welcoming body, flooding him with thick Alphan seed.

They lay together, just like this, sweaty bodies pressed tight and Will's cock firm and occasionally twitching out more of his release, until the Alpha's knot finally deflated enough for him to slip free of Hannibal's body, though they both whined pitifully at the sudden emptiness and lack of pressure.

They remained quiet for even longer still, a companionable sort of silence they'd grown accustomed to over the last weeks together, even with everything that had happened in the last few days. Hannibal found he couldn't find it within him to let his thoughts wander too far from the Alpha pressed warm and close to his back, the black cloud of the previous days seeming to fade in importance with his Alpha so nearby, soothing his Heat and his hectic thoughts.

"I meant what I said, Hannibal. I'll help you however you need me throughout your Heat, but this isn't required. If you don't want my knot again, if you don't want my bed, I'll help you move back to your nest." Hannibal could hear the hesitation, the insecurity, layered in Will's voice and he found that his chest ached and he wanted nothing more than to soothe him.

"Will -"

Will ran his fingers absently through Hannibal's hair, moving them so that they were more comfortable on their sides, the position somehow even more intimate than being mounted like a bred Omega. "I'll stand in as your Alpha if you need me to, sign whatever it is you need in order to get you back home to Paris."

"Will -" Hannibal tried again, trying to turn in Will's arms but the Alpha only squeezed his arms more tightly around him to keep him in place.

"I'm sorry you got caught up in the business, in all my bullshit, before I could get you out easier, more safely. I'm sorry you had to go through that...but at least this way, now, you get to keep your old life, you can go home." The Alpha's voice got high and thready on the last word, and Hannibal let out a little huff of frustration.

"Will," Hannibal finally managed to free himself from the cage of Will's arms to turn his body, closing the distance between them and dipping his head to nuzzle against Will's cheek, soothing both of them in equal measure, breathing in the scent of sated Alpha, even if it were slightly tinged with the bitter scent of his fear at the prospect of losing Hannibal. "I'm already home, Will. I want to be here. With you."

Will looked at him for a long time, confusion, hope, and desire warring in his eyes all at once. "But you can't even practice medicine here, not like you want. Not like you deserve."

"I don't need to be a surgeon to be happy, Will. And, in any case, it's a full-time job keeping you alive and patched up on your own, so I imagine I'll be far too busy for my own practice."

Will held his breath for long enough that Hannibal started to grow concerned, finally letting it out all at once and closing his eyes tightly. When he opened them again the Alphan red had faded to a thin ring around his bright blue irises, and his gaze was full of something far more than Hannibal had ever expected to see directed at him, and more than he'd ever imagined he might feel in return.

"You want to stay here."

“I want to stay here.” Hannibal answered with a smirk, Will growling lowly at him and leaning forward to playfully nip at his grinning mouth.

“You want to stay here with *me*. ” Will confirmed, his hands gripping more firmly at Hannibal’s back where they rested.

“There’s simply no other way, Will. If I leave you who would ensure you don’t run off and get yourself killed or maimed? You’ll be in constant danger and with no doctor. I couldn’t possibly leave you, it would be unethical.” Hannibal teased, leaning forward to kiss the little frown of frustration from Will’s lips and from between his eyes. When he pulled away Will was grinning back at him, his fangs showing against his lower lip.

His heart clenched at seeing Will's adoring gaze, his grin slipping to a small, hesitant smile when he admitted, "I'm in very real *danger* of falling in love with you, Hannibal."

Hannibal couldn't stop his smile, leaning closer to press a soft kiss to the Alpha's lips. "Good. I've always been a fan of reciprocity."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for staying with us on this one, we were so happy to see the love and support!

Up Next Week: A surprise chapter for a previous story we hope many of you will enjoy as much as we did!

End Notes

We hope you're enjoying this new verse inspired by a prompt from our dear friend Julius!

If you wanna see more of our collaborative works you can follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Tumblr](#) for all sorts of extra content and teasers!

'Til next time!   BellaRai

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!